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The Four Gospels

Purpose of the Project plus an important caveat

This project is *not* meant to be a sermon or a religious exposition. Rather, it is to provide some background to the gospels and to try to put them in some sort of historical and chronological context.

The gospels cover the years of Jesus' life, especially the years of his adult ministry leading up to his death. There are too many acts in Jesus' life to include them all in one project so further projects are probably necessary. Also, this project does not deal with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus; this is a complex issue and needs another project to do justice to it.

An important caveat

There are many disagreements in both the historical “facts” of Jesus life and ministry and also the chronology of events. [**Chronology** means the arrangement of events or dates in the order of their occurrence] Regarding what happened, we need to be reminded that there were no news reporters in those days to record what actually happened.

All of what is now written down was passed down orally from memory but doing this leads to errors. [Refer back to the “*Pass the message game*” mentioned in the previous project on “*Genesis and Exodus*” to see how errors very easily creep into the oral tradition of passing on accounts of events.]

Further, the gospels sometimes agree but often disagree due to different purposes of the gospel writers and to different audiences they were writing for irrespective of the accuracy of the information they received. (This is discussed later on pages 32 – 33).

A brief introduction to Jesus and the Gospels

In the previous project, I discussed the first two books of the Old Testament – Genesis and Exodus.

The word “**testament**” means an agreement (or covenant) between people or groups.

In everyday parlance, “testament” means a “will”, a formal directive providing for the disposition of one's property after *death* (from Latin: a will, from *testārī* to bear witness, from *testis* a witness).

In the biblical context, it refers to an agreement or covenant instituted between God and man.

The *Old* Testament is the covenant or agreement between God and Moses/Hebrews/people of Israel that came into effect in the time of Moses. The main purpose of the Old Testament was to reveal God's word to the Jewish people. God gave the Jewish people a set of laws and rules for them to live by. The central theme of the Bible, in Jewish eyes, is this contract or covenant between God and his people, i.e. the Jews.

The *New* Testament is the covenant or agreement between God and the Jewish people instituted by Christ to come into effect after His death. In this project, the emphasis is on just the four gospels, the first four books in the New Testament.

Note: The word *testament* may also refer to either the *complete* Old Testament or New Testament, or even of the complete Bible.

Websites

As you read through the text, you will come across references to websites. These websites are listed on the last few pages of the project. Material from many of these has been used in this text. In addition, a few websites in the list are not referred to in the text. These are background or “extension” websites to allow readers to obtain more information about topics that interest them.

The Gospels

The word “gospel” derives from the Anglo-Saxon for “god spell” meaning “good news”. The term refers *not so much to a biography of Jesus as to the higher meaning of his life, of a new covenant between God and man, the arrival of salvation – and this certainly must be considered “good news”*.

The writers of the gospels are deemed “evangelists” from the Greek *euangelistes* meaning “bringer of good news”.

The gospels are **Matthew**, **Mark**, **Luke**, and **John**. They deal with the life, ministry, teachings, death and resurrection of **Jesus** and have been accepted as authentic by the Church from at least the 2nd century AD.

The first *three* gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke – are known as the “**Synoptic Gospels**”. The fourth gospel – that of John – is quite different from the other three.

Synoptic gospels

The first three gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke – are referred to as the “**Synoptic gospels**” (synoptic from the Greek, “*taking the same view*” or “*with one eye*”) because they include many of the same stories, often in a similar sequence and in similar or sometimes identical wording.

They Synoptic gospels stand in contrast to the gospel of John, whose content is often distinct from the other three gospels. An important difference is that the **Synoptics** suggest Jesus' ministry *lasted one year* whereas **John's** that it covered a *three-year period*. Similarly, there is little disagreement in the Synoptic Gospels between their accounts of the arrest, trial, death and resurrection of Jesus. (*Note: In this project, we are taking the length of Jesus' ministry as three years. See page 42.*)

When were the four gospels written

There have been many problems trying to establish *when* the Gospels were written. But here are the years that most scholars believe to be correct:

- 1 **Mark** (written *first* during the first Jewish revolt/war against Rome, c. AD 69 – 70. [c. = about])
- 2 **Matthew** c. AD 85.
- 3 **Luke** c. AD 95. Almost all of Mark's gospel appears in those of Matthew and Luke.
- 4 **John** c. AD 100.

Thus the writers of Matthew, Luke and John wrote *after* the first Jewish revolt/war (AD 66 – 73) but before the second revolt (AD 115 – 117) and third revolts (AD 132 – 136) had taken place. See pages 11 – 12 for more on these revolts/wars.

As the dates above show, the gospel of Mark was the first to be written though it is placed second in the New Testament.

Difference between an apostle and a disciple

The word "apostle" is from the Greek "*apostolos*" meaning "*one who is sent away*." In the New Testament, that means sent away to preach; this is the same as the word "*missionary*" (one who is sent forth on a mission). The word "disciple" simply refers to a *learner* and also a *believer* and is used throughout the New Testament to refer to people who believed in Jesus and followed and learnt from Him (Luke 14:26 – 33).

So, the different tales of the life and work of Jesus (gospels) were composed over a period of at least 30 years, ranging from about AD 69/70 to about AD 100. As we will see later, Matthew and Luke probably based their gospels on the earlier version by Mark. John's Gospel, however, appears to have been composed either independently, or at least in an independent way.

The gospels cover the time from the birth of Jesus until his death.

The date of birth of Jesus of Nazareth is not stated in the gospels or in any secular text, but most scholars today assume a date of birth between 6 BC and 4 BC and a date of his death between AD 30 and AD 33.

In this project we take the year of birth of Jesus to be in 4 BC and the year of his death to be AD 33.

Websites that you might refer to at this point. "Gospels – an overview", "Gospels – what are they?", "Gospels – subjects covered" and "Gospels – an introduction to the four gospels".

Notes on the use of BC and AD

In our Western calendar, there are *two* ways to date years:

- 1 BC and AD.
- 2 BCE and CE.

You might have seen these terms to mark years. So what exactly do they mean?

1 BC and AD

BC: This stands for "Before Christ."

AD: This stands for the Latin phrase *Anno Domini*, which means "In the year of our Lord." It refers to the years *after the birth* of Jesus Christ.

BC and AC refer to the same years as BCE and CE do, just in a more *religious* way.

2. BCE and CE

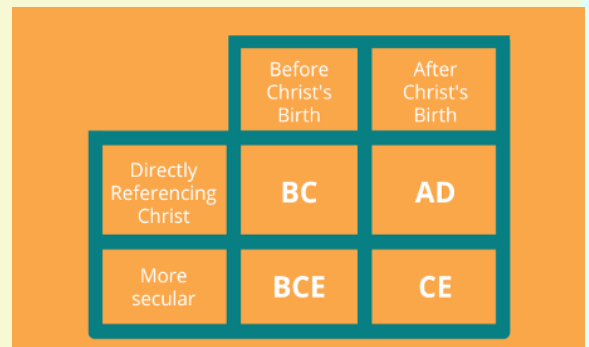
BCE: This stands for "Before Common Era."

CE: This stands for "Common Era."

These refer to the same years as BC and AD do, just in a more *secular* way (or by members of other religious faiths).

Note: BC is usually placed *after* the year. e.g. 100 BC, while AD is often placed *before* the year, e.g. AD 100 (though placing it after is not wrong, e.g. 100 AD).

So, because we are looking at the gospels (religious writings) in this project, we will be using BC and AD.



No year ‘zero’: There is no year ‘0’. It might feel counter-intuitive to have one set of years (AD) where we count *forwards*, and another set of years (BC) where we count *backwards*. (So, if you were living at the time, a year ‘0’ would not make sense. This arose as the modern calendar – called the *Gregorian calendar* – which is the dating system we use to measure years today, was created in October 1582 by Pope Gregory XIII. That’s why it marks time based on the birth of Jesus Christ. The Gregorian calendar uses the birth of Jesus as Year 0 (though they got the year wrong!! See below).

If you want to talk about something that happened a hundred years *before* Jesus Christ was born, you would write that year as “100 BC.” If you want to talk about something that happened a hundred years *after* Jesus Christ was born, you would write that year as “AD 100.”

Comment: Jesus was born in 4 BC or four years "*before Christ*" which certainly seems paradoxical. But this was due to the later change in chronology to AD in the time of Pope Gregory.

Jewish calendar: This is somewhat more complicated than the Gregorian calendar. Refer to website link “Jewish calendar”.

Itinerant preachers in the time of Jesus

The word “itinerant” means “*travelling from place to place to do work or duty*”.

Jesus was a Jewish *itinerant* preacher. There were many such preachers at that time among Jewish people so there was nothing unique about Jesus in this respect. Many had *Messianic* pretensions. Itinerant preaching was part of the culture of the Jewish people at that time. There were also itinerant preachers like Jesus in *Old Testament* times, such as Elijah and Jeremiah. Different itinerant preachers often preached different messages as there was no established religion of Judaism at the time.

There were many internal disputes between the sects of these itinerant preachers. It was in this climate that Jesus emerged amongst other radical preachers as a potentially dangerous rebel.

John the Baptist, the teacher of Jesus, was another such itinerant preacher. As a young adult, Jesus went to be baptised by John the Baptist and shortly thereafter began his adult ministry and became an itinerant preacher and healer himself (Mark 1:2 – 28).

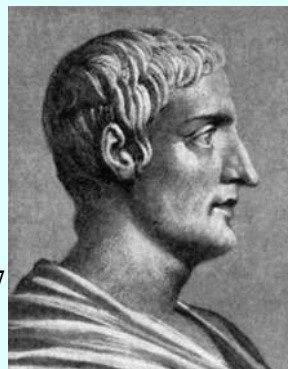
Many of these itinerant preachers and “Messiahs” ended up being executed for the crime of *sedition against the Roman Empire* just as John the Baptist and Jesus were executed.

Refer to the website “Itinerant preachers in the time of Jesus”.

Did Jesus exist? Searching for evidence beyond the Bible

Many people have asked whether Jesus of Nazareth actually existed. Of course, this is assumed in the gospels and other New Testament books. But is there *extra-Biblical* evidence for Jesus’ existence? Here we comment on two early historians – the Roman historian **Tacitus** (c. AD 55 – 118) and Flavius **Josephus** (c. AD 37 – 100).

Tacitus was a *Roman* historian and politician. He is



Portrait of Tacitus



Portrait of Josephus

widely regarded as one of the greatest Roman historians. Josephus was a *Jewish* historian who later became a Roman citizen and took a Roman name. Both Tacitus and Josephus were among Rome's best historians and both were non-Christians. In fact, Tacitus despised Christians, which suggests that his comments may be taken more seriously. Tacitus mentions a "*Christus*" who was executed by Pontius Pilate and from whom Christians derived their name.

Almost all the following statements about Jesus, which are stated in the New Testament, are corroborated or confirmed by both Tacitus and Josephus:

- 1 He existed as a man.
- 2 His personal name was Jesus (= Joshua). It was actually a **common name in first-century Galilee** (about as common as "John" is to us).
- 3 Pilate ordered the decision that he should be executed, as both Tacitus and Josephus state.
- 4 He was executed during Pontius Pilate's governorship over Judea.
- 5 His execution was specifically by crucifixion (a Roman method of execution), according to Josephus.

In this project, like Tacitus and Josephus, we accept that Jesus *did* exist even if some of his miracles, such as walking on water, curing people of diseases and raising people from the dead may be difficult to believe. Josephus saw Jesus as primarily a miracle worker, though he doesn't say if he believed the miracles were true!

For more on this, refer to the websites under "Jesus – did he exist? Searching for evidence beyond the Bible".

The original Jesus movement

Christianity began as a sect among Judaism, one of several sects that existed about the same time. Josephus says many of these were wiped out by the Romans, and their followers were disbursed. Jesus was also captured and executed but many of the followers of Jesus seem to have survived unlike those from other sects.

[The early Christians did *not* disappear](#) as those of other sects did, and they had to ask themselves why. Being Jews, they began to search the *Old* Testament scriptures for clues related to their movement, which no one may have noticed before. They found, for example, promises of an anointed king who would come and die.

[This is where it all began](#). And Matthew especially, in his gospel, writes about how Jesus came to fulfil what was written in the Old Testament. (More, lots more, about Matthew referring to the Old Testament.)

A 20th century Jesus movement

This was a Christian movement which began on the West Coast of the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s and primarily spread throughout North America, Europe, and Central America, before it subsided in the late 1980s. Members of the movement were called "Jesus people", or "Jesus freaks".

The Jesus movement sought to return to the original life of the early Christians. The movement subsided but left a major influence in Christian music, youth and church life.

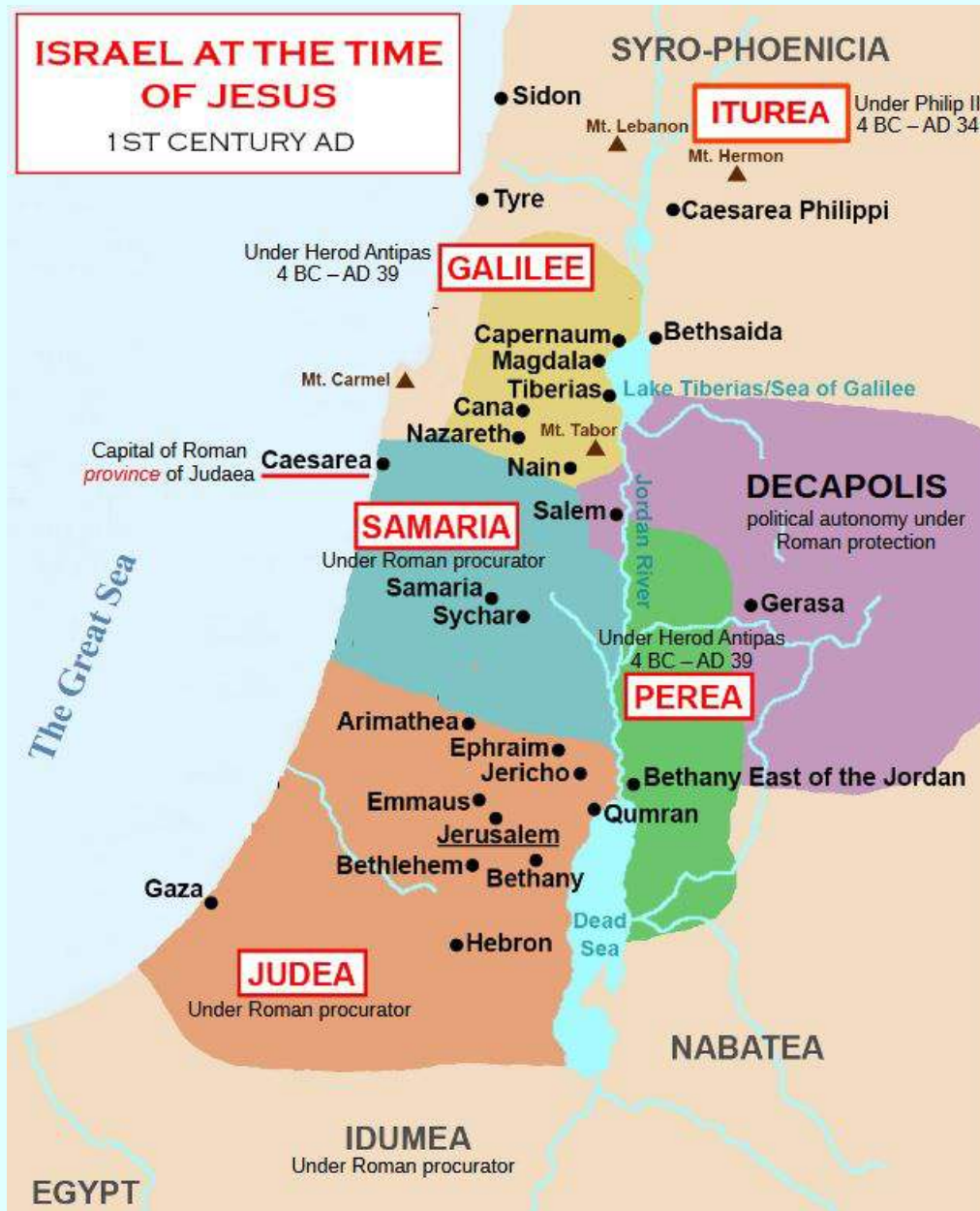
For more on this movement, refer to the website link "Jesus movement – the modern one".

The Setting for the Gospels; the Land of Israel

The land of Israel at the time of Jesus

Before delving into the gospels in detail, we need to look at some of the background, particularly the geography of the gospel times and some of the Roman and Jewish rulers involved. First, the geography.

The map below shows Israel at the time of Jesus in the 1st Century AD.



The land of Israel at this time was divided into **five main** provinces. They were: **Judea**, **Samaria**, **Galilee**, **Perea** and **Iturea**. **Judea**, **Galilee** and **Perea** were reckoned by the Jews themselves to be *Jewish* provinces. **Samaria** and **Iturea** were predominantly *Gentile* provinces. So Galilee and Judea, the *principal* Jewish areas, were surrounded by Gentile territories.

The proximity of Gentile and Jewish areas meant that there was some interchange between them, including trade. There also was some exchange of populations: some Jews lived in Gentile cities and some Gentiles lived in at some of the Jewish cities.

But as we will see later (pages 42 – 43), this geographical arrangement led to differences between Jews

and Gentiles, especially between the Gentile province of Samaria and the surrounding Jewish provinces of Galilee and Judea to the extent that people travelling between Galilee and Judea would try to avoid going through Samaria (except, notably, Jesus).

Notes:

- 1 It is said that Aristobulus I, the first Hasmonean (Maccabean) king of Judea (104 – 103 BC) compelled the inhabitants of Iturea, if they wished to remain in the country, to live in accordance with the Jewish law of the Judeans, so they may not have been “genuine” Jews. (More on the Hasmoneans later – pages 10 and 11)
- 2 The map above also shows **Decapolis**, which literally means “*Ten Cities*” in Greek. This was a league of semi-independent Greek cities next to, but *not* part of first-century Israel.

Terms – Jew and Gentile

The term “*Jew*” originates from the Biblical Hebrew word *Yehudi*, and in its original meaning refers to *just* the people of the Tribe of Judah. Later, a “*Jew*” was anyone who belonged to one of the 12 tribes of *Israel*. A “*Gentile*” was everyone else – any person who was not Jewish.

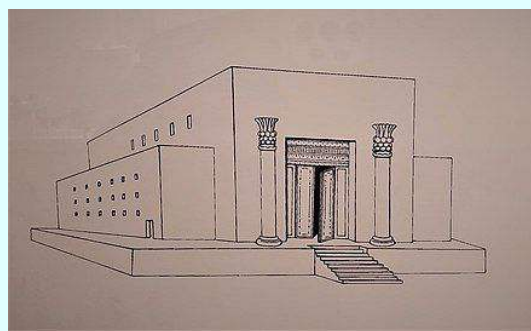
Some more background – Israel from the time of Moses to the time of Jesus

From the project “*Genesis and Exodus*”, the enslaved Israelites left Egypt under the leadership of Moses heading for the “promised land”. The entry into the promised land took place in about 1400 BC.

The Israelites had roamed in the desert for 40 years. But none of the generation, including Moses, that had escaped from Egypt, were allowed to enter the promised land. Only two of the leaders – Joshua and Caleb – together with the descendants of the original generation did so. They crossed the Jordan River into land already occupied by Canaanites and by force took over the land and shared it among their 12 tribes. (Refer the earlier project for the names of these tribes.)

Saul, David and Solomon: Israel and Judah

The land of Israel remained more or less like this for about 400 years after the time of the Exodus to the time of **King David** (reigned c. 1035 – 970 BC) who consolidated the various tribes under his *single* rule, having taken over from **Saul**, Israel's first king. David chose the city of **Jerusalem** as his capital. In 1000 BC, an important temple, known as the **First Temple**, was built in Jerusalem by Solomon, Davids’ son.



Modern artistic depiction of the First Temple in Jerusalem

On Davids’ death, this single united kingdom continued under his son Solomon (reigned c. 970 – 931 BC). On Solomon’s death, his son **Rehoboam** became king of the united country. But this united kingdom did not last for very long.

Following a rebellion by the 10 *northern* tribes in about 931 BC, the nation split, with these 10 tribes forming an independent *Kingdom of Israel* under the rule of **Jeroboam** in the north who established his capital in the *town* of **Samaria**. Poor old Rehoboam saw his rule limited to another new kingdom in the *south*, namely, the Kingdom of *Judah* with its capital still at Jerusalem.

So:

United kingdom of Israel (from David to Solomon to Rehoboam)

Northern kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam

Southern kingdom of Judah under Rehoboam

The map below shown the divided kingdoms of Judah, with its capital at Jerusalem and Israel, with its capital at Samaria. Compare this map with the earlier map (page 6) of Israel at the time of Jesus in the 1st century AD.

Notes: Judah is what later was called Judea. “Judah” is a Hebrew version; “Judea” is a later Greek and Roman adaptation of the name "Judah". The name Samaria was originally just the name of a town. It likely began being used for the entire kingdom not long after the town had become the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel.



More disruption – Assyria, Babylonia, Persia and Greece

The geographic location of Israel made it a frequent target for invasion from outside countries. Two such invasions were by the Assyrians (in 731 BC) and by Babylonia (in 586 BC).

Assyria

In 721 BC, the northern kingdom of Israel (not Judah) fell to the Assyrians. A portion of the population (mainly from the upper classes) was led off to Assyria as captives. To eke out the depleted population of

Israel, the Assyrians brought in colonists from other parts of the Assyrian Empire. The outsiders intermarried with the remaining natives. These *half-Jewish, half-Gentile* people became known as the **Samaritans** (after the name of Samaria, the *capital* of Israel) and lived in the part of Israel that became known later as **Samaria**. This mixture is why the Samaritans were disliked so much in Jesus' time. In addition, most of those brought in by the Assyrians retained their earlier non-Jewish and so heretical religion adding to their alienation.

However, the population of the *very* northern part of Israel – the region later known as Galilee – still remained rather depleted. In fact, Galilee remained essentially **empty** for more than half a millennium (500 years) following the **Assyrian** invasions.

Babylonia

By the end of the 7th Century BC, Assyria had been replaced by a new imperial power, Babylon. In **587/6** BC, the Babylonians, under King Nebuchadnezzar, destroyed Jerusalem, the capital of the southern kingdom of **Judah** including the **First Temple**, and exiled a small portion of its people (again from the upper classes) in Babylon. Those who remained behind were mainly peasants and the unlettered.

Persia

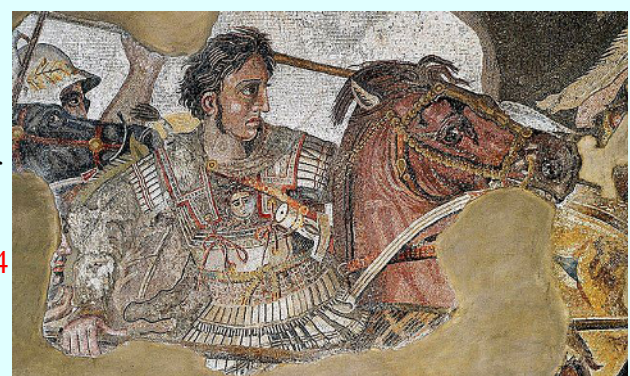
The Babylonian empire collapsed in about **538** BC after being attacked by the Persians under King Cyrus II of Persia (Cyrus the Great). He allowed the exiles from Judah to return. They were thus only in captivity for a few years. Under Persian rule, the regions of Israel and Judah had two centuries of peace (yes, believe it or not!), until Greece entered the region. One Persian ruler even promised his Jewish subjects a reduction in taxes and funds to repair the city of Jerusalem and the First Temple, which the Babylonians had destroyed in 586/7 BC. By 515 BC the reinstated Jewish residents had completed building this **Second Temple**. (It too was later destroyed by the Romans in AD 70; see for example page **12**.)



A portrait of Cyrus the Great (600 – 530 BC)

Greece

In late **332** BC, Alexander the Great of Greece (356 – 323 BC) invaded the Middle East, including the area which is now Israel, during his campaigns against the Persian Empire. By **198** BC the successors of Alexander (known as the **Seleucids**) were solidly in control, and would remain so up to the Maccabean Revolt (**168 – 164** BC). By the time the Greek sway over Israel came to an end, Greek cities had been established throughout the country, and Greek beliefs and cultural values had sunk strong foundations, ultimately to tear the nation apart before Judea regained its independence. *Note:* It was to these *Greek* Jews and Gentiles that some gospel writers were addressing. Under the suzerainty of the Greek (Seleucid) rulers, Judea witnessed a further period of peace, respect and protection of its institutions.



Alexander, depicted on his horse fighting Persian king Darius III

See also the website “Palestine in Greek Times”.

The Maccabean Revolt & Hasmonean Dynasty

Note: Refer also to the website links on “Hasmoneans and Hasmonean dynasty”, “Hasmonean/Maccabean revolt”, “Maccabean Revolt & Hasmonean Dynasty” and “Israel – history of”.

Hasmonean revolt

However, in about 170 BC, for reasons not fully understood, the previous Greek policy of respect and protection was overturned and key Jewish religious rites and traditions in Judea were banned (possibly egged on by *Greek-leaning* Jews who wanted to “reform” Jewish religious practices).

This sparked a revolt by a *traditionalist* Jewish priestly family against Greek rule. It was launched by the Jewish priest Mattathias and later led by his son, Judah (or Judas) Maccabeus (also a Jewish priest) and known as the **Maccabean Revolt** (or sometimes the **Hasmonean Revolt**). It lasted from 168 – 160 BC and concluded with their victory and the recovery of the Second Temple in Jerusalem and re-establishment of traditional religious Jewish practices in the temple.



A portrait of Judas Maccabeus

After this victory in *Judea*, there was a policy of expansion which resulted in an independent Jewish kingdom known as the **Hasmonean kingdom**, which lasted from 140 – 63 BC. As well as controlling Judea, it expanded into the neighbouring regions of Perea, Samaria, Galilee, Iturea and Idumea (south of Judah – see map page 6). So the map of the kingdom at the *peak* of Hasmonean influence would be similar to the map shown on page 8.

Galilee re-populated: On page 9 we mentioned that Galilee remained depopulated for more than half a millennium (500 years) following the **Assyrian** invasions. Much of the re-population resulted from transplanted Judeans who moved there when Galilee returned to Jewish political control after the Hasmonean rulers took control of the region. So the Galilean population of Jesus’ time were descendants of these Judean immigrants of a century or so earlier. They were considered different in many respects from Jews living further to the south, closer to Jerusalem who had a fierce attachment to what they regarded as “true” Judaism.

Galilee is a very important region of interest. Most of Jesus’ miracles recounted in the New Testament were performed in Galilee. And after the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70 by the Romans (see pages 11 – 12), **the centre of Jewish scholarship in Palestine moved to Galilee.**

So the map above of Israel at the time of Jesus (page 6) shows how it appeared following centuries of changes and especially after the Hasmonean influence on the region.

Notes:

- Judas Maccabeus was a member of a family known as the Hasmoneans. The name “*Hasmonean*” was possibly named after a recent ancestor named *Asmoneus*. Because Judas Maccabeus was the hero of the revolt, the family has come to be called, in English, the *Maccabees* – a name that is more familiar now than the more accurate family name *Hasmonean*.
- The feast of *Hanukkah* was instituted to commemorate the recovery of the temple by the Hasmoneans (see above and also page 75). See also the website “Hanukkah – the story of.”

Note: Sometimes, Hanukkah seems to be spelt with two ‘n’, that is, Hannukah (see the [html](#) website in the above website link).

Rome steps in

However, the Hasmoneans had a policy of expansion in which they sought control of Nabatea, the region south-east of Judea (see map on page 6). This attracted the attention of Rome. Pompey, the leading Roman general of the time, then took over Judea and Nabatea in 63 BC and also intervened in Hasmonean affairs. Although Rome still allowed the Hasmoneans to rule (until 37 BC), Rome's intervention signalled the end of their *independent* Jewish kingdom.

In 37 BC, the Roman Senate installed *their* hand-picked king, Herod the Great (his name in English), and Judea became a client-state of the Roman empire. Herod the Great reigned from 37 – 4 BC (more of this later). Even then, Herod tried to bolster the legitimacy of his reign by marrying the Hasmonean princess, Mariamne. This ended the era of *independent* Hasmonean rule which had lasted 103 years (140 BC to 63 BC).

So, the Roman occupation of Israel, when the army of the Roman Republic conquered the Hasmonean Kingdom in 63 BC, was the last in a long line of invasions starting with the Assyrians and the Babylonians, then the Persians and the Greeks with Alexander the Great. Any by the time of the birth of Jesus, the Roman Empire controlled not only Israel but most present-day countries bordering the Mediterranean basin including North Africa and was still expanding.

Romans and Samaria

When the Romans established control over Judea from the Hasmoneans, the Samaritans were liberated and allowed the free exercise of their (heretical) religion. This was good a policy for the Romans, who weakened the Jews by establishing Samaria as an enemy in their midst (and geographically between Judea in the south and Galilee in the north) and these made all of them easier to rule. In New Testament times the **hatred** between Jew and Samaritan was particularly intense.

For more on the history of the history of the Samaritans and why they were hated, refer to the website “Samaritans – history and hate”.

Revolts against the Romans

The people of the southern region of Judea however, resisted the occupation by Rome and tensions finally erupted in the *First Jewish-Roman War* (also known as the Great Revolt) of AD 66 – 73 which concluded with the Romans destroying Jerusalem in AD 70 (Cf. the timeline on page 17). *Note:* The Gospel writers, writing from about c. AD 70 and after, would have been well aware of this war.

Jewish-Roman Wars/Revolts [AD 66 – 136]

[There were three Jewish–Roman Wars/Revolts (AD 66–136) – or two, depending on how you count!]

The first revolt: (AD 66 – 73, well after Jesus’ death) In AD 66, there was a Jewish revolt in Judea stemming from Greek and Jewish religious tension. Josephus tells us, in the lead up to the Jewish revolt of AD 66, there were many itinerant preachers who stirred up trouble which lead to the uprising. In AD 67, Roman Emperor Nero dispatched forces to restore order. The revolt was put down in AD 70, soon

after Nero's death in AD 68. The **city of Jerusalem was completely destroyed** including the **Second Temple of Jerusalem**. It is unlikely that many Jewish rebels in Jerusalem or the surrounding area survived; many were scattered or sold into slavery.

During this first revolt, **it seems that the followers of Jesus took a pacifist view and did not participate in the defence of Jerusalem, but fled into the hills** (Matthew 24:16 *“then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”*). This suggests too that Matthew’s gospel was not completed until *after* the first revolt.

There had been protests and mini-revolts against the Romans for many years before this. It might even be argued that because the authorities took action against Jesus (i.e. killed him in AD 30), 40 years of additional life were given to the nation (instead of Rome attacking the nation then and destroying Jerusalem and the **Second Temple**).

Herod the Great, however, in his attempt to gain the good will of his subjects, had initiated a vast restoration and enlargement of the Temple, one which amounted, virtually, to a rebuilding. He began this restoration in about **19 BC** and it was not actually completed until **AD 63** (long after his death in 4 BC) taking 82 years! It was completed just three years before the beginning of the revolt that was to destroy that same Temple forever (which is why the picture below left is of a *model* of the temple!).



A model of the reconstructed Second Temple, completed in AD 63, but destroyed again in AD 70



Satellite view of the Dome of the Rock situated where the Second Temple once stood

Note: The Temple of Jerusalem was on the site of what today is the Dome of the Rock (the main Islamic shrine in modern Jerusalem). (See photo above.)

The second revolt: (**AD 115 – 117**) Fought by Jews mainly in other countries of the Roman Empire, for example, Cyprus and Egypt but only marginally fought in Judea. As such, some historians *don't count* it as one of the three revolts. This, of course, occurred well after the four gospels had been written.

The third and final revolt (or the second, depending how you count!): (**AD 132 – 136**) Despite the heavy losses and the destruction of the Second Temple from the first war, Jewish life continued in Judea. However, dissatisfaction with Roman rule eventually led to another revolt from AD 132–136 by the Jews of Judea, which appears to have resulted in the **destruction and depopulation of Judea**. The result was a level of destruction and death that has been described as a genocide of the Jews, a ban on Judaism, with many Jews being sold into slavery or fleeing to other areas around the Mediterranean. On Emperor Hadrian's death (in AD 137 just after the revolt ended), restrictions and persecution of the Jews were eased (for a while), but the Jewish population of Judea had been greatly reduced.

For more, refer to the websites “Jewish uprisings against Rome – first and third [AD 66 – 136]”, “First and Second Temples” and “Herod – the temple of Herod”.

The Roman and Jewish rulers of the time: Some of the main characters

The Romans ruling Israel at this time had an effect on Jesus' life and ministry, as did the Jewish leaders, both secular and religious. So we need to know something about them.

Roman rulers

Caesar Augustus (63 BC – AD 14)

When Jesus was *born* (4 BC), Caesar Augustus was the emperor of Rome (reigned 27 BC – AD 14).

Tiberius

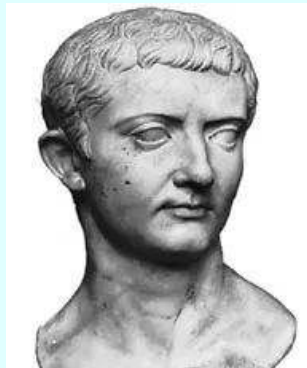
According to the Gospels, Jesus of Nazareth preached and was executed during the reign of Tiberius, by the authority of Pontius Pilate the Roman governor. Tiberius was Emperor of Rome from AD 14 to 37. Jesus of Nazareth was crucified c. AD 30 while Tiberius was still emperor.

Nero

Nero was the Roman emperor and reigned from AD 54 to 68. He was emperor during the *first* Jewish-Roman war (AD 66 – 73) which thus began during the 12th year of his reign. This war is noted for Romans breaching the walls of Jerusalem and destroying the Second Temple of Jerusalem as mentioned above (which was one of the last fortified bastions of the rebellion) in AD 70. Of course, this was not during the lifetime of Jesus but occurred just as the gospels started to be written.



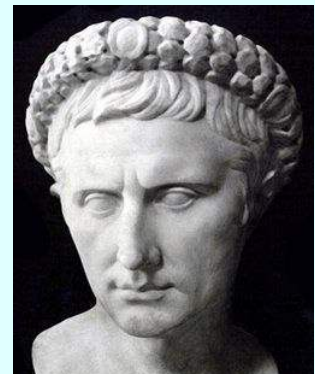
Emperor Augustus



Emperor Tiberius



Emperor Nero



Pontius Pilate

Pontius Pilate

He was the fifth *governor* of the Roman province of **Judaea**, serving under Emperor Tiberius from AD 26/27 until he was replaced in AD 36/37. He is best known for being the official who presided over the trial of Jesus and ultimately ordered his crucifixion.

Judea and Judaea

Note: Don't mix up **Judaea** and Judea – they look similar but the spellings are different! **Judaea** was a *Roman province* which incorporated the regions of Samaria, Judea and Idumea from AD 6. The capital of this province, where Pilate as governor resided, was at *Caesarea Maritima* (or just *Caesarea*), a coastal city in Samaria. On those occasions when Pilate had to be in Jerusalem, he used the palace compound built by Herod the Great as his headquarters. (Refer to the



The ruins of Caesarea (Maritima)

earlier map on page 6 of Israel at the time of Jesus for the location of Caesarea.)

In the time of Jesus, Galilee was *not* part of the Roman province of Judaea and so was *not* under direct Roman rule, as Samaria and Judea were, but was under the rule of a member of the Herod clan (Herod Antipas). But in AD 132, a long time after Jesus' time, Galilee was merged into Judaea to form an enlarged Roman province named *Syria Palaestina*. with the capital still at Caesarea (Maritima).

Note: The *Jewish* capital was *always* Jerusalem in Judea even though the Romans had shifted theirs from Jerusalem to Caesarea (Maritima) when the Roman province of Judaea was formed.

Refer also to the website “Judaea (Roman province)”.

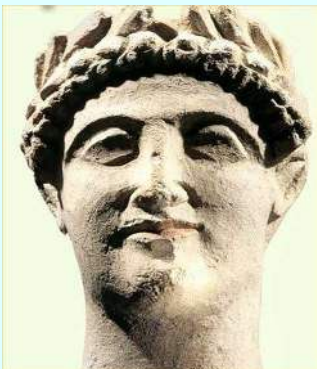
Jewish rulers: the Herodian dynasty

The Romans appointed Jewish people to positions of power so we also have to be familiar with them. This includes the **Herodian dynasty**, which began in 47 BC and lasted until AD 100. The dynasty began with Antipater I (who was from Idumea, south of Judea) who was made *Procurator* of Judea in 47 BC and reigned until he was assassinated 43 BC.

Herod the Great

Perhaps the most famous member of the dynasty was **Herod the Great**. He was appointed by the Roman Emperor Augustus to be King of all Judaea in the aftermath of the Hasmonean uprisings and their desire for independence from Rome, and reigned from 37 BC until his death in 4 BC.

Herod was probably reigning at the time of Jesus' birth, which may have taken place in 4 BC. He had the full support of the Romans.



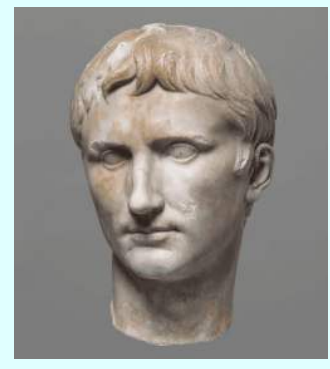
Herod the Great



Herod Antipas



Philip II



Herod Archelaus

This Jewish independence under the Hasmoneans was still within living memory for those living under Herod's rule and there were protests against Herod. Herod the Great eventually become extremely paranoid and utterly ruthless in the pursuit of law and order. He employed **secret police** and regularly cracked down on the local population to keep the peace. He even had three of his own sons executed!!!

Herod the Great also killed his wife, Mariamne in 29 BC (look back at page 11). He married again eight times after her death and may have had 10 wives altogether (although one at a time!) and at least nine sons, some of whom were appointed by the Romans to rule various regions.

Although Herod the Great was cruel, he was an effective ruler over a fractious and rebellious nation. While Herod was a client king, Rome did *not* really made its presence felt and the empire left Herod to handle his own people.

Sons of Herod: Here we look just at **three** of his sons who reigned during the time of Jesus.

1 Herod Antipas

Reigned as “tetrarch” of **Galilee** and **Perea** for 43 years from 4 BC to AD 39. He is referred to as both "Herod the Tetrarch" and "King Herod" in the New Testament, although he never actually held the title of king. His reign was for the most part one of peace and prosperity for the land. But, it was he who executed John the Baptist (more on this later – pages **36, 48**). In AD 39, Antipas was accused by his nephew Agrippa I of conspiracy against the Roman emperor Caligula, who sent him into exile in Gaul (region of present-day France and other Western European areas) where he died at an unknown date.

2 Philip II: (26 BC – AD 34)

Reigned as “tetrarch” of **Iturea** in the north-east, from 4 BC until his death in AD 34. He thus ruled for the whole life of Jesus and like his brother Herod Antipas, seemed to have been a model ruler.

3 Herod Archelaus: (23 BC – AD 18)

He was the “ethnarch” of Judaea (i.e. **Idumea, Judea and Samaria** – remember?) and came to power following the death of his father Herod the Great in 4 BC and ruled for nine years from 4 BC to AD 6. However, unlike his two brothers above, he was *not* a model ruler; he was deposed in AD 6 by Caesar Augustus the Roman emperor at the time, due to his cruelty and, like Herod Antipas before him, was sent into exile in Gaul. More later about Archelaus related to the birth of Jesus (page **38**).

Refer to the websites “Herodian dynasty” and “Herod the Great (+ many others under ‘Topics’)”.

Back to Roman control

Upon the deposition of Herod Archelaus in AD 6, his territories (Idumea, Judea and Samaria and) were transformed into a Roman province with the new name of **Judea** and under the rule of a Roman governor. The Roman governor from then on would rule in conjunction with the **Jewish high priest of the Temple in Jerusalem**. The priests of the temple were effectively collaborators with the Romans and did what they could to keep the local population under control.

There had always been small protests, and occasional open revolts but serious organised resistance against the Romans would quieten down between the handover of AD 6 and Jesus’ death in about AD 30. However, tensions within Judea were always bubbling under the surface.

Often confusing names: Names of places can be confusing, especially Judea, Judaea and now Iudea!

Roman control – Tetrarchs and ethnarchs

Ethnarch: Just a term used for any ruler of a people or province in parts of the Roman Empire.

Tetrarch: One of *four* joint rulers of a kingdom, which can include an ethnarch (from the Greek *tetra-* = four, and *-arch* = ruler).

When Herod the Great died in 4 BC, his three sons and one daughter, i.e. *four* people, received parts of his kingdom. Two sons and the one daughter become tetrarchs (one also named an ethnarch).

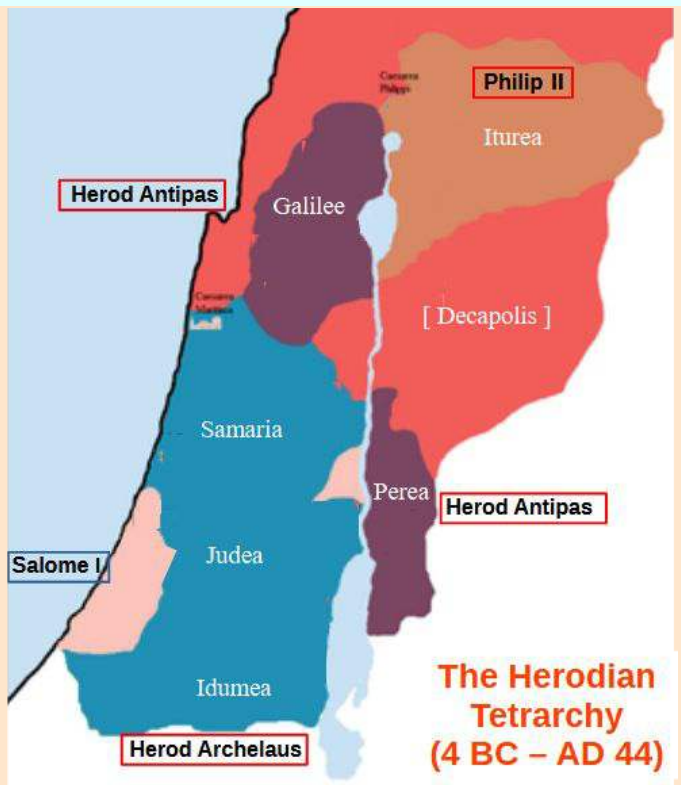
The Herodian Tetrarchy (4 BC – AD 44): This was formed following the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC, when his kingdom was divided between his sons: **Herod Antipas** and **Philip II** as *tetrarchs* and Herod **Archelaus** as an *ethnarch*, That makes three tetrarchs. The fourth was Herod's sister **Salome I**, who

briefly ruled a small part of Judea as a tetrarch. With her death in AD 10, her domain was incorporated into the province of Judaea (Samaria, Judea and Idumea – remember!). The other parts of the Herodian Tetrarchy continued to function under Herodians. As mentioned above, Herod Antipas ruled Galilee and Perea until AD 39, while Philip the Tetrarch ruled the Iturea region until AD 34.

The map (right) shows the Herodian Tetrarchy and its four tetrarchs. The territory of Judaea (Samaria, Judea and Idumea) is coloured blue. The territory coloured orange (which included Decapolis) was not part of the Herodian Tetrarchy but was directly administered by Rome and given considerable political autonomy under Roman protection.

Note: This map looks very similar to the earlier one on page 6. However, in this map, Samaria, Judea and Idumea are combined into one province.

Refer to the websites “Herodian Tetrarchy” and “Tetrarchs and ethnarchs”.



Roman governors and procurators

These are titles we often come across when reading about Roman rule. Both governors and procurators were appointed by either the Roman emperor or the Roman Senate. But since the emperor and senate appointed procurators *independently*, conflicts between the appointees were frequent.

A **governor** was appointed to maintain Roman rule in a *major* region or province. Thus, in the time of Jesus, Judaea was a major Roman province (the blue area in the above map) and Pontius Pilate was its governor with its capital at Caesarea (Maritima). A governor had ultimate responsibility.

A **procurator** was the title of a “second-in-command” to a governor. The position of procurator started during the reign of the Emperor Augustus (27 BC – AD 14). Quite often, governors of a province appointed procurators to *govern* a part of the province and act as their second-in-command. Pilate, while *governor* of the whole Roman province of Judaea, appointed *procurators* in Samaria, Judea and Idumea, who were answerable to him. Look again at the map of Israel at the time of Jesus on page 6 and note “Under Roman Procurator” in these three regions.

Note: Linguistically, a procurator was an official in charge of the *financial* affairs of a *province*. (The Latin name also mean a “*caretaker*”. The English verb “to procure” is derived from the same root as “procurator”.) But in reality, they were more powerful than just “caretakers” or in charge of finances but were “second-in-command” to a governor, as mentioned above.

How the Romans helped to spread the gospel

The Romans were cruel and ruthless but during their dominance they provided important elements that

supported the spreading of the gospel:

1 Pax Romana, which literally means "Roman peace" (12 BC – 93 AD): Over 100 years of relative peace in the Roman Empire. This meant that most people had (relative) freedom and safety of movement throughout the land.

2 An excellent road system designed to move troops quickly and efficiently throughout the empire also provided easy travelling for Christian missionaries.

3 Rome maintained the communication and literary system of that age.

(a) The Greek language was the universal language of literature and communication between cultures and the Romans did not try to change this.

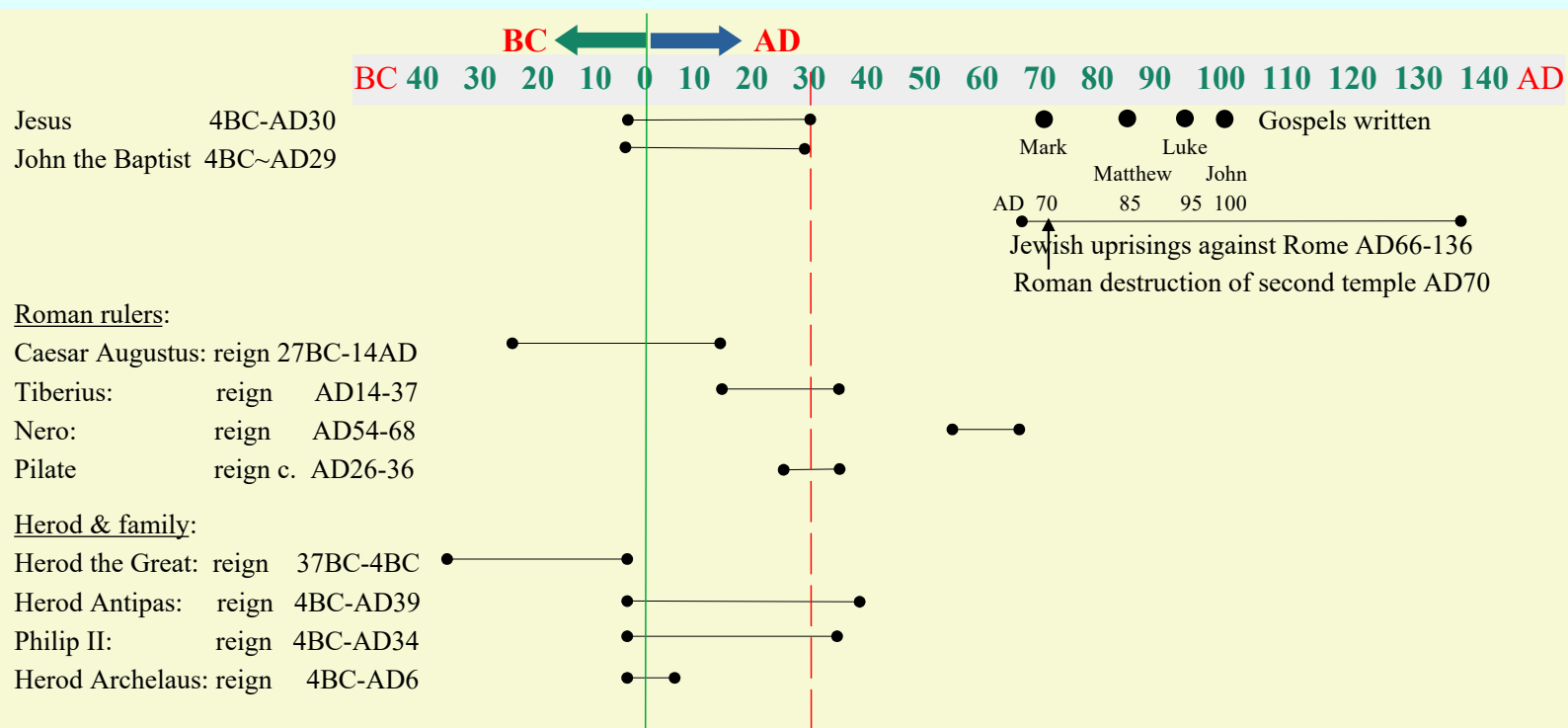
(b) The Latin language was used as the language of law.



A Roman road that can still be used today

Visual timeline

The timeline below shows in diagrammatic form the times of many of the Roman and Jewish rulers together with some key events that we have discussed above.



For a very informative website dealing with many of the topics discussed above, refer to the website "History of Jews and Judaism in the Land of Israel". Another is the website on "Christianity".

For other visual timelines, refer to the website "Visual timelines".

We now turn our attention to a more in-depth discussion of the four gospels.

The Four Gospels and the Story of Jesus

Why four gospels?

Many people have asked, “Do we really need four gospels in the Bible? That seems redundant. Wouldn’t one be sufficient?”

Maybe that would be the case if Jesus were a regular person who just did regular things. But he wasn’t, and he didn’t. And maybe, as mentioned earlier, if news reporters had been following Jesus around and recording everything he said and did, one gospel may have been enough. (That would have made writing the gospels – and this project – a lot easier!)

John’s gospel says that the world itself couldn’t hold all the books that could be written about Jesus’ ministry (John 21:25). He was probably being hyperbolic, but if there’s that much to say about Jesus, then we shouldn’t be surprised that we have multiple accounts of him in our Bible. If the world couldn’t hold his whole story, then surely a 16-chapter booklet such as Mark (the shortest gospel) couldn’t!

We have four gospels because during the early church period, following the death of Jesus, *four* people found it necessary to tell the story of Jesus to *different audiences* from *four different perspectives* (more on this later when we look at Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in greater detail). So to get their message across, maybe it was convenient for the gospel writers that were no news reporters with written “facts”!

Were there other gospels?

By the time of the 2nd century (AD 100+), there was no *official* New Testament and there were dozens of gospels floating around, so the Church Fathers of this time had to distinguish what they believed to be orthodoxy, the “*correct beliefs*”. Some of these gospels, such as the **Gnostic Gospels** (gnosis = knowledge [in Greek]) had radical views of Jesus. (The Gnostic gospels were 52 texts discovered in Nag Hammadi, Egypt in 1945, and included “secret” poems and myths attributing to Jesus sayings and beliefs which are very different from those in the New Testament.) So, as such gospels did not follow what Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote, they were deemed heresy (Greek: *haeresis*, meaning “*a school of thought*”).

Refer also to the website “Gnostic Gospels”.

The process of putting together what would become The New Testament we have today took a long time – centuries in fact.

The Roman Emperor steps in

When the Roman Emperor **Constantine** (reigned AD 306 – 337) converted to Christianity in AD 312, he wanted to use it as a way of unifying his fragmented Empire. There was then a concerted effort to standardise Christian doctrines and to promote an agreed **canon** of New Testament scriptures. Some of the “*way-out*” writings were side-lined, or even suppressed. But the vast majority simply stopped being reproduced.

By the end of the 4th Century, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were widely accepted as integral to the 27 texts which constitute the New Testament. Together with the Old Testament, these form the **canon** of sacred scriptures.



A bust of Emperor Constantine

Definition: A biblical **canon** is a set of texts (also called "books") which a particular Jewish or *Christian* religious community regards as part of the Bible.

Why didn't Christianity die out?

Historians point to the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine as the single reason Christianity did not die out. Once Christianity was adopted as the Emperor's religion, it quickly developed a strong institutional structure – one that would out-live the Roman empire itself. Christianity achieved a phenomenal growth rate: it is estimated that it had hit roughly 30 million followers by AD 350, only about 40 years after Constantine's conversion. [See also the website link “Christianity – why didn't it die out in the 1st Century?”]

Gospels not included: The lost gospels

Don't think that *only* four gospels were written. There were many others but, for one reason or another, are not included in the New Testament. These include the gospels of **Thomas, Philip, Mary and Peter**. We knew nothing about them until, as mentioned above, they were unearthed in 1945 by a group of farm hands digging for fertiliser in the Egyptian desert having been buried away for around 1,600 years.

The Gospel of **Philip** was probably written in the 3rd Century and speaks about a close bond between Jesus and Mary Magdalene: “*The saviour loved her more than all the disciples. He kissed her on her...*” The rest of the sentence is missing and some speculated it went on to say “*mouth*”, which suggests a more intimate relationship!

The Gospel of **Thomas** is a collection of the sayings of Jesus written in the early 2nd Century. Jesus is described as a mystical revealer of hidden truths rather than a saviour who died for people's sins.

The picture (right) shows the first pages of the Gospel of Thomas discovered Egypt, in December 1945.



The first pages from the Gospel of Thomas

The Gospel of **Peter** was discovered in 1887, earlier than the other lost gospels. The book's authors may have believed Jesus had a divine power which transcended his human body. On the cross, Jesus says “*my power has forsaken me*”. This could be interpreted as Jesus' divine spirit being taken up to heaven while his body is left on the cross. *That is, he didn't die.*

Some of the lost gospels were written in the 2nd and 3rd Centuries – significantly later than the four canonical gospels – and this counted against them. Further they did *not* have mass appeal to what became by then mainstream Christianity. Add this to Constantine's drive to promote an agreed canon of New Testament scriptures meant these other gospels were not included.

Refer to the website “Gospels not included in the New Testament canon.”

Oral vs written transmission

No news reporters in those days to record the “*good news*”.

But *after the death of Jesus*, stories about his life, death and resurrection, his sayings and teachings and parables, his travels and miracles, and his disputes with the religious authorities, began to *circulate, but not in writing. Instead, in the oral tradition of the time*, they would have been passed on through the spoken word. As Jesus' followers expected him to return at any moment, certainly within their own lifetimes, there was little motivation to write anything down for future generations; but as eyewitnesses began to die, and as the missionary needs of the church grew, there was an increasing demand and need for *written* versions of the founder's life and teachings.

After a period, much of this oral and written material was made available to the Gospel writers who were in different parts of the Christian world (as we will see soon). As mentioned earlier, the gospels were written many years after the events they portray (about AD 70 – AD 100).

But because the oral material would have been passed from person to person, there would undoubtedly be a loss in accuracy!!! – Look back at “Pass the message” in the previous project on “Genesis and Exodus”.



“Pass the message” - oral transmission of information

Writing the gospels

The gospel writers were *not* eyewitnesses nor did any of them ever *directly* claimed to be an eyewitness; most just received oral and some written accounts passed on to them. One exception is **Luke**, who says he *interviewed* eyewitnesses but gives no further details.

The *traditional* view is that **Matthew** wrote his Gospel first, probably in the **Aramaic** language. The *modern* view is that **Mark's Gospel came first**, and because it was first, the assumption is that he used *oral* traditions and because of this, it is difficult to know for sure whether Jesus really said what Mark attributed to him.

The Aramaic language

The Aramaic language is a Semitic language of the Northern Central, or Northwestern group that was originally spoken by the people known as *Aramaeans* (on the *east* and *north* of the Sea of Galilee). It was most closely related to Hebrew, Syriac, and Phoenician languages.

The villages of Nazareth and Capernaum in Galilee (on the west of the Sea of Galilee), where Jesus spent most of his time, were Aramaic-speaking communities. It is *also* likely that Jesus knew enough *Hebrew* language for religious purposes.

So Jesus was an Aramaic speaker, not a Hebrew speaker.

Look back at page 6 the previous project “Genesis and Exodus” for a note on how Pope Francis corrected the then Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who said that Jesus spoke Hebrew. (Photo right, was also used in the previous project.)

Perhaps also refer to the website “Aramaic – the language of Jesus”.



The Pope corrects the Prime Minister of Israel

Both Matthew and Luke based their gospels on the written gospel of Mark together with other collections of material about Jesus, both oral and written.

Equally, there are many problems trying to establish *where* and *when* the Gospels were written, and, in the case of Matthew and John, according to modern scholars, *who actually wrote them*. The gospel writers did *not sign* their writings. So detective work was needed to determine the writers.

After writing, the original texts of the gospels existed for about 100 years with no names. None of the writers signed their work! How frustrating!!!

Assigning names

It was the Church Fathers in the 2nd century AD who attempted to assign names to the gospels. In their attempt to provide backgrounds for the writers, they tried to align them as close to the original circle of Jesus as possible. They were also aware of a fundamental problem; **the first disciples of Jesus were fishermen from Galilee who could not read and write the level of Greek used in these (early/original) documents.**

Language used

The consensus of modern scholars is that the New Testament was written in **Greek** but that an **Aramaic** source text was used for portions of the New Testament, especially the **gospels**.

The gospels are theological, not historical documents

The four gospels are *not biographies* of Jesus, nor are they history of the times as we would define the word “history”.

What each gospel attempted to be was a **theological** explanation for the events in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. By narrating his life, ministry and death, the gospels argued that these events should be interpreted in *relation to* the history of Israel. The word “**theology**” comes from two Greek words that combined mean “the study of God.” Christian theology is simply an attempt to understand God.

So, in the gospels, don’t expect all the historical details to be accurate – about Jesus, other people, or historical events – as long as the theological message in the gospels gets through.

Perhaps also refer to the website “Theology – definition”.

Distinctiveness of the gospels

The gospels were produced from c. **AD 70** to perhaps **AD 100**. Their portraits of Jesus differ, who he was and why he was here on Earth. They also differ in relation to both later reflections and changes in the demographics of the earliest Christian communities over time.

Each gospel has its own distinctive understanding of Jesus and his divine role, and scholars recognise that the differences of detail between the gospels (historical or theological) are *irreconcilable*, and any attempt to harmonise them would only disrupt the distinct theological message of each gospel.

Elements shared: Because each gospel is about the same main character – Jesus – some elements are shared. But even with the sharing, there are also differences. For example, the two **nativity stories** of Matthew and Luke are thrown together under the



*Luke's nativity - stable, manger, sheep
(but no shepherds in this picture!)*

Christmas tree, but they differ in many ways. (Matthew has a star and the Magi. Matthew 2:1 – 12; Luke has the stable, manger and the shepherds (Luke 2:8 – 20) but no star or Magi. *Note:* Most images of the nativity show *everything combined* from both Matthews’s version and Luke’s version.



Matthew's nativity – star + magi

The theological message

Here are the messages as written by two different people.

Person 1: The basic theological message of the gospels is to tell good news of Jesus as the Christian saviour, bringing peace and acting as a sacrifice who has redeemed mankind from sin.

Person 2: In Christianity, the gospel is a message about salvation by a divine figure, a saviour, who has brought peace or other benefits to humankind.

Problem of what to do with Gentiles

After the death of Jesus, his disciples spread the theological message in (Jewish) synagogues throughout the Eastern Roman Empire, and to their surprise they encountered Gentiles (non-Jews) who wanted to join. What to do with them?

In about AD 49, that is about 16 years after the death of Jesus, a council, known as the **Council of Jerusalem** was set up to decide what to do with this new Gentile group. Some believed that these Gentiles had to *fully* convert to Judaism, meaning circumcision (for males), dietary laws, and Sabbath observance. This group was designated as **Jewish-Christians**.

Others argued that they did *not* have to convert first, championing the inclusion of **Gentile-Christians**. Led by James (Jesus’ brother), it was decided that the Gentiles did *not* have to fully convert, but they did have to cease all idolatry to other gods. (James, also called “James the Just” was the first bishop of Jerusalem.)



An artistic depiction of the Council of Jerusalem with "James the Just" in the centre.

The picture is an artistic depiction of the Council of Jerusalem with “James the Just” in the centre.

This council was the beginning of the Church's mission to the Gentiles. The Council's hard-won decision to move from a message just for Jews to the universalism of the message for everybody is not only the **very important event in the history of the early Church but remains a constant challenge for the Church today if it wants to remain credible in the contemporary world and to its own members.**

For more, refer to the website link for “Council of Jerusalem (AD 49)”.

Gospel of Matthew

Writer

Not known for certain. A “Matthew” is named in the New Testament as one of the 12 disciples of Jesus and according to Christian *tradition*, he was the author of the Gospel of Matthew. However, many biblical scholars reject this claim. The author is not named within the text as the *author*, and the majority view *today* is that the author was an *anonymous* male Jew writing in the last quarter of the 1st century. The superscription "according to *Matthew*" was added some time in the 2nd century. Matthew contributes 21% unique content to the gospel.

Matthew is the English form of the Greek "*Mattathias*". Mattathias was also the name of the father of Judas Maccabeus and the heroic initiator of the revolt against the Seleucids (look back at page 10).

Problems with authorship

It is rather annoying that *the gospels do not carry a clear statement of authorship* as books do today!

One reason is that time of the writing of the gospels was a hard one for **Christians**. Both Jewish and Roman hostility were pronounced. The persecution by the Emperor **Nero** (reigned from AD 54 until his death in AD 68), was not long in the past and, in the aftermath of the Jewish revolt/rebellion/uprising against Rome, the Jews that survived were resentful of the **failure of the followers of Jesus to join the rebellion** (look back at page 12). It might well be that a gospel writer preferred to remain anonymous out of considerations of personal safety.

The writer's profession

Matthew (*assuming* he was the writer) is mentioned in Matthew 9:9 and Matthew 10:3 (NIV) as a “**publican**”, that is, a tax collector who was called to follow Jesus. This may have occurred in the town of Capernaum in Galilee. If so, he would have collected taxes for the Roman Empire. The Church Fathers used such information as his being a tax collector to claim the writer as probably Matthew. See also page 18 and 21 for the role of the Church Fathers.

Roman tax collection

Matthew, like all tax collectors, would have collected duties on imported goods bought by farmers, merchants, and caravans. Under the Roman Empire's system, Matthew would have paid all the taxes in *advance* to the Roman authorities, then collected it from the citizens and travellers to reimburse himself. Tax collectors were notoriously corrupt and therefore hated because they extorted far and above what was owed, to ensure their personal profit. But because their decisions were enforced by Roman soldiers, no one dared object.

So for the locals to *endure* the presence of the Romans was bad enough, to *pay taxes* to them was worse, but to *collect taxes* for them was the limit and beyond the limit!



Drawing of a tax collector collecting taxes for the Romans

Date of writing

Traditionally the *first* Gospel to be written, perhaps c. AD 40 – 50 in *Aramaic* (c. 7+ years after Jesus' death), with a *Greek* translation sometime later but still before AD 70 (the date of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple). However, according to some modern scholarship, there was no Aramaic original. Instead the Gospel was written by an unknown Jewish Christian, *using most of Mark's Gospel* and other collections among his sources. These might have included sayings compiled by the apostle Matthew. A suggested date is c. AD 85, which is more than a decade after the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70.

Where written

Possibly written in Roman Syria in the city of Antioch (located in modern-day south-east Turkey; see map, right). This of course, was much later than the “Matthew” who first encountered Jesus while a tax collector in Capernaum which would have been about AD 30 (see previous page). Hence these two “Matthews” may not have been the same person.



Readers/Audience

Matthew's gospels was written by a **Jewish author** who was steeped in **Jewish tradition**, and who wrote for a *Jewish* audience and especially for Jewish *Christians*. Hence he never bothers to explain Jewish customs, since his audience would be familiar with them. There are frequent references to *the Law of Moses, Jewish prophecy, and many Old Testament quotations* which a Jewish audience *knowledgable in Old Testament lore would understand. Matthew makes it clear that events in the life of Jesus are the fulfilment of prophecies made in the Old Testament.*

Matthew makes 129 references from the Old Testament, more than any other gospel. Jewish sects had a basic method when they constructed their arguments. They turned to the Jewish Scriptures and the Law of Moses and *re-interpreted* these texts to validate their arguments. Like their Jewish brothers, the writers of the Synoptic gospels, and especially Matthew, also turned to the Scriptures.

Why written

Matthew doesn't state his purpose explicitly (unlike John). However, his opening verse makes it very clear what this book is about: Jesus, the Messiah or Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham prophesied as the saviour of Israel that was promised throughout much of Jewish history. He also presents Jesus as a *Jewish* teacher.

Why is it placed first?

One view is that it was believed there had even been an earlier form of Matthew's gospel written in Aramaic (look back at “Date of writing” above). This gave it more credible historical roots and so they placed it first in the New Testament. Another view is that Matthew is written by a *Jewish author* who is steeped in *Jewish tradition*, and he writes to a *Jewish audience*. so it had to be placed first (before Mark, who was probably a *Gentile* – see page 27)!

What it covers

It begins with the birth of Jesus, his infancy, then to John the Baptist, his teaching and ending with his death and resurrection. As Matthew is writing for a Jewish audience, he traces traces Jesus' ancestry back

to [Abraham](#), father of the *Jews* then to Moses. (But compare Luke, below, who traces Jesus' ancestry back to [Adam](#), father of the *human race*.)

How the gospel begins

It begins with the ancestry of Jesus, which is very important for Matthew, and is described as starting with Abraham and up through King David and his son Solomon to Jesus in order to emphasise the *royal descent* of Jesus (Matthew 1:1 – 17). How the birth of Jesus comes about is then *briefly* described (Matthew 1:18 – 25). For the details of the birth of Jesus, see pages [37ff](#).

Portrait of Jesus – the new Moses

Matthew structured his entire gospel around the claim that Jesus was the new Moses. In Deuteronomy (18:15), Moses said: "*The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.*" Some examples of this as they relate to Jesus:

- Matthew's nativity story includes numerous references to the story of Moses and the Israelites in Egypt.
- Herod the Great in the nativity story plays the part of Pharaoh (in the story of baby Moses).
- Matthew includes Moses in the Sermon on the Mount (like Moses on Mount Sinai).

In the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, the prophet looks forward to a triumphant day when God would make a new start, so to speak, with his people; wipe the slate clean and begin again. *Christians consider the New Testament representing the fulfilment and climactic completion of the Old Testament.* The *Jews*, on the other hand, adhere to the *original covenant only* and to them the *Old Testament* is the whole of the Bible.

Jesus – the line of David

To someone steeped in the Jewish tradition as Matthew was, the first task to be undertaken if the story of the Messiah is to be told, is to demonstrate that Jesus *is* the *Messiah*. And to do that, it must be shown, first of all, that the Messiah is a member of the line of *David*. Matthew therefore begins with a genealogy. Matthew 1:1 "*The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham*".

Abraham was the one with whom God first made a covenant relating to the Jewish people who were to descend from him. Matthew then, in an [artificial scheme](#) using the number '14', presents the genealogy from Abraham to David to Jesus (Matthew 1:17) "*Thus there were 14 generations in all from Abraham to David, 14 from David to the exile to Babylon, and 14 from the exile to the Messiah.*"

For more, refer to the website "Gospel of Matthew – significance of '14' (though some of it can be difficult to understand!).

Mary his mother – a virgin?

The name of Jesus' mother in Hebrew, is [Miriam](#) (which was also the name of Moses' sister). In Aramaic, her name became [Mariam](#) which became [Maria](#) in Roman times then Marie in French and [Mary](#) in English.

Because of the emphasis that her pregnancy was the result of the action of the Holy Spirit and not of man, Mary is considered by Christians to have been a virgin even while pregnant and is therefore commonly called the "*Virgin Mary*" or just "*the Virgin*" (which, in order that Jesus descends from David, it has to be assumed that Mary descends from *David*). To support the virgin birth, Matthew, of course, has to cite an Old Testament prophecy but can find [only one](#): Isaiah 7:14. "... *Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear*

a son . . . “ But the Hebrew word used by Isaiah actually means "young woman" and can apply equally well to one who is *not* a virgin. There are no other clear references to the virgin birth anywhere else in the New Testament.

See website “Jesus – was it a virgin birth?”

Joseph his father

Jesus’s father, Joseph, never appears as a *living* person anywhere in the New Testament except in connection with the tales of Jesus' birth. It is usually assumed, therefore, that he died some-time during Jesus' youth.

Other points

The Hebrew word “Messiah” means "*the anointed one.*" And the name Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua.

Refer also to the website “Gospel of Matthew – introduction” and “Gospel of Matthew” and perhaps “Old Testament verses in the New Testament”.

Gospel of Mark

Writer

The gospel of Mark is also *anonymous*; the writer did not sign his gospel, but it is attributed to St. Mark the Evangelist (Acts 12:12; 15:37). He was probably named John Mark, *son of a Mary of Jerusalem [not Jesus' mother] and a cousin of Barnabas*. Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas at the start of their First Missionary Journey which began in about AD 45. Mark was also *traditionally* a companion and the "interpreter of the apostle **Peter**", and Peter possibly provided Mark with much of the material for this Gospel (though most modern scholars seem to reject this). Mark contributes only 3% of unique gospel, that is, is only in his gospel (as the other 97% of what he wrote was copied by the other gospel writers).

Where the writer was from

Mark was probably born in Cyrene in Libya (see map, right) and was a Greek speaker.



Date written

Several dates have been suggested ranging from **AD 53** to **AD 70**. These are as follows:

- **AD 53**: The earliest it could be written would be c AD 53, the year AD 53 Mark being when Mark could have joined Peter in Rome. This would be 20 or more years after the death of Jesus.
- **AD 64**: In about AD 64, shortly after the **Great Fire of Rome** in **AD 64**, followed soon after by the destruction of Jerusalem in **AD 65**. and its temple in **AD 70**.
Note: According to Tacitus and other writers, Emperor Nero blamed the devastation of the AD 64 fire on the Christian community in Rome, initiating the empire's first persecution against the Christians.
- **AD 66**: After AD 66, when the first Jewish rebellion



A painting of the Great Fire of Rome in AD 64

against Rome began. (Look back at page 11.)

- **AD 70:** This is the latest it could have been written, as it must have been in existence and circulating when the gospels of Matthew and Luke came to be written – since the two latter borrowed from Mark.

However, most scholars believe Mark probably composed his work in or about the year **AD 70**, after the failure of the First Jewish Revolt and the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans. That destruction shapes how Mark tells his story.

Where written

Not known for certain. Some scholars think he wrote his work in Rome, others that he wrote it in Alexandria (map, right), still others suggest Syria.



Gentile or Jew?

Mark may have been a *Gentile* since he misunderstands some of the Jewish traditions he was writing about. (So the written Bible is not infallible!)

Readers

The way Mark tells the story suggests that his audience lived outside their homeland, spoke **Greek** rather than Aramaic, and was *not* familiar with Jewish customs. They were probably citizens of the **Roman** world, and particularly *Gentile Christians and Christians of Jewish origin (with less knowledge of Jewish lore)*. The gospel of Mark has *some references to Old Testament prophecy, and so the writer needed to explain Jewish words and customs* to his readers. But unlike Matthew, who never bothers to explain Jewish customs as his intended audience was a Jewish one, Mark has to do so. According to Mark, Jesus himself approved of the **Gentile** mission (or at least, Mark says that Jesus said so!). Also, in Mark 7:24 – 30, when Jesus healed the daughter of a Phoenician woman, who was a Gentile and not a Jew, Jesus says she had greater faith than the Jews (more of this on pages 68 – 69). (But because his audience was Gentiles, it may be Mark, rather than Jesus, who “said” this!)

Why written

To show Jesus Christ is not only the active and powerful Son of God, but also the *servant, saviour and redeemer* (or ransom) of sinful man. As his gospel was written first, Mark also had to convince the Roman authorities that the Jews he was writing to were not in league with the rebels of the (First) Jewish Revolt against the Roman Empire. Mark wanted to emphasise Jesus’ *humanity* and his *suffering* (which, according to Mark, the disciples just didn’t seem to “get”).

The first and shortest gospel written

Mark begins with Jesus’ adult ministry. According to some *modern scholarship*, this is the first gospel to be written. It is certainly the *shortest* with just 16 chapters! Writing first must have been taxing for a writer who had no written records and who depended on oral reports, which can change over time (cf. “Pass the message” game again). However, Mark may have had written material provided by Peter, but at a later date – perhaps **AD 65 – 75**. This would have been around the time of the *destruction of Jerusalem* (page 11 again). Mark’s material was then used by Matthew and Luke in writing their Gospels.

Why is it placed second?

Although the first gospel to be written it is placed second in the New Testament. Mark, unlike Matthew, was less familiar with Jewish customs and as Matthew’s gospel was for the Jew first and then the Gentile,

could have been the reason why Matthew was placed first.

What it covers

It begins with John the Baptist and Jesus as an *adult* and the baptism of the Jesus then proceeds to his ministry and death (but no resurrection appearances). Mark, the oldest of the gospels, has nothing to say about Jesus' birth and childhood.

How the gospel begins

Mark begins his gospel with the baptism of the *adult* Jesus by John the Baptist. He has nothing to say of the “virgin” birth in Bethlehem, nor of any marvels or miracles relating to Jesus' infancy. He does not even make mention the descent of Jesus from David or anyone else in the Old Testament. In this gospel, Jesus is referred to as the Son of God (that is, the Messiah) but rarely as the Son of David.

Used by other gospel writers

Most scholars agree that Mark's gospel was used by Matthew and Luke in composing their accounts; more than 90 percent of the content of Mark's Gospel appears in Matthew's and more than 50 percent in the Gospel of Luke.

Other comments

Mark believes that those who proved to be the *best* “disciples” were **women**, the **sick**, and the **Gentiles**. Mark also writes that Jesus was the **son** of Mary (and she was *not* the *mother* of Jesus).

Refer also to the website “Gospel of Mark”.

Gospel of Luke

Writer

Again, the author is again *anonymous*. The traditional view is that the writer was Luke the Evangelist, a friend and travelling companion of the apostle Paul. And from Colossians 4:14, written by Paul, it is assumed that Luke was a medical doctor by profession and Paul's personal doctor (perhaps a useful travelling companion!). Luke contributes 30% of unique gospel content. He was the only *Gentile* to write a gospel.

Where the writer was from

Luke was born a *Greek*, between AD 1 and AD 16 in the Hellenistic (Greek) city of *Antioch*, Syria, Roman Empire (modern-day Antakya, Hatay, Turkey) where Matthew was from. Antioch was the largest city in Roman Syria and the third-largest in the Roman empire.

Date

The Gospel According to Luke was written in roughly **AD 95** (or possibly a little earlier), most likely during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian (reigned AD 81 – 96). This is known as its earliest form comes from extensive papyri fragments dating to the early or middle of the 3rd century.

Where written

Scholars seem to agree that it was written in a *Greek* setting. Places suggested are Antioch, Ephesus or



An 11th-century Byzantine manuscript containing the opening of the Gospel of Luke.

Smyrna (cities along the west coast of what today is Turkey), or even in the region of *Achaia* in southern Greece (capital *Corinth*); see map, right.



Gentile or Jew?

Still not certain if Luke was Jewish or Gentile or something in between, though probably Gentile. His name is Roman, for Luke ("Loukas" in Greek and "Lucas" in Latin) is a shortened version of either Lucius or Lucanus, both good Roman names. This, in itself, settles nothing for Roman names were sometimes adopted by Jews in New Testament times. (Paul is also a Roman name, but the apostle Paul was *certainly* Jewish.)

Readers

Generally aimed at a *Greek audience and Gentile Christians* in the new Christian religion that is splitting with Judaism, and for those sympathetic to Christianity and considering conversion, particularly the community of Greek-speaking Jewish Christians in places such as Syria. To do this, Luke *rewrote* Mark's gospel in a way to make it fit the ears of these Gentiles. Hence Jewish customs, unfamiliar to his audience, are explained and sometimes Greek words substituted for the Hebrew.

Why written

To give an orderly account of the life of Jesus perhaps using some eye-witness accounts. Luke says he interviewed eye-witnesses but gives no further details. His gospel is meant to give believers an accurate, chronological understanding of Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection (cf. Mark which has no resurrection appearances).

According to some modern scholarship

Written by Luke using the Gospel of Mark, and other collections amongst his main sources. Luke is judged to have had a thorough Greek education. Consequently, his gospel has greater *literary* value than that of either Matthew or Mark.

What it covers

Jesus' birth, his presentation at the temple (at age 12), baptism by John the Baptist, adult ministry, death and resurrection. But unlike Matthew, who traces Jesus' ancestry back to Abraham, rather of the Jews, Luke traces Jesus' ancestry back to *Adam*, father of the *human race*. He gives noticeable attention to *women*, with a total of **43** references. (Matthew and Mark *combined* equal only **49** references.)

Length

Luke is the longest of the four gospels – in fact, it's the longest book of the New Testament!

How the gospel begins

First, the coming birth of *John the Baptist* is *announced* (Luke 1:5 – 25) followed by an *announcement* of the coming birth of *Jesus* (Luke 1:26 – 56). The birth and childhood of *John the Baptist* is then described (Luke 1:57 – 80). For Luke, John the Baptist is important in the scheme of things. *Then* the birth of Jesus, as in Matthew, is described in Chapter 2 (Luke 2:1 – 38)! Luke, like Matthew, also describes the ancestry of Jesus but traces it back to Adam, the first man, to emphasise both Jesus' royal descent and his descent from God though, unlike in Matthew, this must wait until Chapter 3 (Luke 3:23b – 38).

Portrait of Jesus – compassionate and forgiving

Luke's gospel is notable for the fact that Jesus spends more time with the **poor and outcasts** than in any other gospel. He includes unique parables, such as **The Prodigal Son** and **The Good Samaritan**, that highlighted mercy and *compassion*. (The image shows a portrait of the Good Samaritan; can you work out who the characters in the picture are?) Another major theme of Luke is *forgiveness*. This is the only gospel where Jesus forgives one of the other crucifixion victims and his tormentors from the cross. And like Matthew, Luke's Jesus is also a new **Moses**. He presents Christ as the perfect man who brings good news to the **poor** and opens the Kingdom of God to the Gentiles (e.g. Luke 4:16 – 21). Refer also to pages **87 – 88** for more on the two parables – The Prodigal Son and The Good Samaritan.



A painting of the Good Samaritan

Other characteristics

Luke puts the disciples in a more positive light (cf. Mark!). There is an emphasis on social outcasts (the women, poor, Gentiles cf. Mark above – women, sick, Gentiles). Salvation is universal and especially for the *downtrodden*.

Refer also to the website “Gospel of Luke”.

Gospel of John

Writer

This is the last of the four gospels. Unnamed, like all the other gospels, but attributed to “*the beloved disciple*,” maybe John, son of Zebedee. Some have even suggested that it was compiled by a *group* of authors and circulated to a mixed congregation that was predominately Jewish or made up of Hellenistic (Greek) Jews. John contributes 46% unique gospel content (though some sources say 90% is unique!).

Notes:

- 1 Hellenistic Judaism was Judaism in the *Greek-speaking* world, including those Jews who spoke Greek and adopted (to some extent) a Greek way of life. (It has been argued, however, that *all* Judaism after the conquests of Alexander the Great was Hellenistic Judaism.)
- 2 Zebedee was a fisherman and the father of James and John, two of Jesus' disciples.

Date

The last written gospel, about AD **100**, 70 years or more after Jesus' crucifixion. John is guessed to have been born in about **AD 9** and so would have been 91 years old in **AD 100** when the fourth gospel might have been written. That is a great age, but certainly not an impossible one. The picture (right) shows a credit-card-size papyrus, from around AD 250 to AD 350, containing about six lines of the Gospel of John written in Greek.



A fragment of a manuscript scroll of the Gospel of John.

Where written

Probably *Ephesus*, a city on the west coast of Asia Minor (present-day



Turkey), before or after his banishment to the island of Patmos which lay off the coast in the Aegean Sea (about 80 km south-east of Ephesus) – refer to the map.



The photo (right) shows the main road in ancient Ephesus leading down to the Ephesus library. *Note:* This is my photo – I have visited Ephesus!

Road down to the library in ancient Ephesus

Readers

The **whole Christian Church – Jew, Greek and Roman** – meaning the whole world in general. John is writing to a community in the mid-90's AD so the audience and the message will not be the same as say Mark who was writing for a community in the AD 70s.

Why written

To emphasise the divine nature of Jesus and to convince his readers that He is the Son of God, the saviour of the world. Further, the *very* early Christians believed that after Jesus' death and resurrection, He would *very shortly after* return and that the kingdom of God would quickly be established. However, due to the lateness of the writing of John's gospel, it would have become less certain than the synoptic gospels on the matter of the *imminent* second coming.

According to some modern scholarship

Scholars seem to agree the gospel was written in Ephesus, around AD 90 – 110. The oral traditions and theology of the gospel were compiled during his lifetime, but that the gospel was finally published by a close companion. This companion might have been another John called "John the Elder", possibly after John's death, though is a lot of discussion as to who he was.

What it covers

It is the most overtly theological, is the first to make judgements *outside* the narrative of Jesus's life. Unlike Luke, John does not aim to record the *whole* life of Christ. It omits any mention of his ancestry, birth and childhood, his baptism, temptation and transfiguration.

John may be the final Gospel, but his narrative begins far, far earlier than the other three. While Mark begins with Jesus' *baptism* and *adult* ministry, and Matthew begins with his *physical* birth, John opens with the *beginning of all creation*: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*" (John 1:1).

Note: John's gospel mainly covers the **Jerusalem** ministry of Jesus. He's scarcely in Galilee at all. (Though in the other gospels, as we will see soon, most of Jesus' ministry occurs in Galilee and very little in Jerusalem!)

John's other roles in the Bible

John (assuming it is the same one who wrote the gospel!) also wrote three New Testament letters (First, Second, and Third John) and the prophetic book of Revelation. He was a leader in the early church, and

he probably wrote his documents after most of the other New Testament books were already written.

How the gospel begins

The gospel opens quite differently than the other gospels. It begins with the same three words that the book of Genesis opens with – “*In the beginning ...*” (John 1:1). It introduces Jesus, not from his birth, but from “*the beginning,*” before creation. John calls Jesus “*the Word*” (Logos) who, as God Himself, was involved in every aspect of creation (John 1:1 – 3) and who later became flesh (verse 14) and lived among us on Earth.

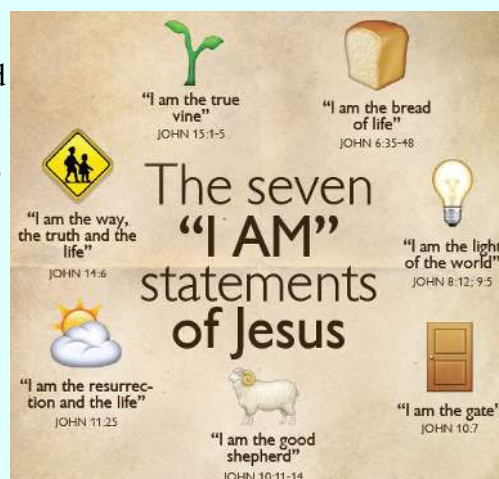
Refer also to the websites “Gospel of John” and “Gospel of John – the chronology of Jesus”.

Portrait of Jesus – the “*I am*”

In John’s gospel, Jesus makes seven statements beginning with the words “*I am*” which is a reference to when Moses asked God his name in Exodus 3:14 “*God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you.’*” For example, Jesus says “*I am the good shepherd*” (John 10:11) or “*I am the bread of life*” (John 6:35).

Jewish listeners sometimes responded violently so indicating that they clearly understood Jesus was declaring himself to be equal to God.

For more, refer to the website “Jesus the “I-AM””.



Other points

- 1 More than 90% of the material in John’s gospel is unique, not found in any of the other three gospels. John appears to rely very little, if at all, on the information the other gospels provide.
- 2 There is an emphasis on “signs” (miracles showing who Jesus was) and the divinity of Jesus is stressed.
- 3 He records **none** of the *parables* of Jesus.
- 4 Alone of the gospels, John’s gospel does not specifically list the names of the 12 apostles.
- 5 John’s is the only gospel in which Mary is *not* named; she is just referred to only as "the mother of Jesus."

The Gospels: There will never will be complete agreement

Because the Gospels were written, *not as historical biographies but as collections of theological teaching material aimed at different audiences* – Jews, Romans, Greeks, the whole world – there will never be complete agreement between them. Also, the order of events is *not* always chronological.

We need to be reminded again that the gospels are *not eyewitness accounts* to, and are *not historical records* of, the life of Jesus and are not intended to be read that way. Hence they will differ. The gospels are not biographies in the modern sense of the word. Rather, they are stories told in such a way as to evoke a certain image of Jesus for a *particular audience*. So different stories for different audiences.

Taken at face value, the Gospels seem to intend a similar *general* sequence of Christ's life: they progress through his birth, baptism, temptation, ministry, passion, death and then resurrection.

Matthew: The bulk of the gospel of Matthew is clearly *not* arranged chronologically.

Mark: The bulk of Mark's gospel is closest to date order but still does not always have events in their exact order. However, like John's Gospel, he doesn't spend time describing Jesus's unusual first days on Earth.

Luke: This gospel is *usually* in date order and gives vital chronological information (e.g. Luke 1:5; 2:1; 3:1,23; 13:6 – 9). However, there are discrepancies probably because he had to reconcile written accounts with (possible) eye-witness accounts.

So, these three synoptic gospels tell the story of Jesus using similar stories, in a similar but not identical order.

John: The gospel of John is arguably the *most chronological of the four* with many time-references being given and yet it omits vast portions of Jesus' life and ministry. The starkest difference compared with the other gospels is that there is no regal/royal tale of Jesus's birth, no mention of Jesus's parents, Mary's immaculate conception nor their long journey to Bethlehem for his birth. There are no angels, no shepherds, no wise men, and later no baptism! Also, whereas in the synoptic Gospels, Jesus speaks in parables; in John, the **parables are absent altogether**; instead he carefully curates and records signs and teachings that point to Jesus Christ's identity as the Messiah, both fully God and fully human.

Two differences in specific events

Although there are *similarities* in specific events, there are frequently differences in the *sequence* of these events. To take two examples:

1 Healing of the centurion's servant and the disciples' controversial plucking of grain on the Sabbath and Jesus' healing of the man's withered hand: *Matthew* places the healing of the centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5 – 13) before the disciples' controversial plucking of grain on the Sabbath and Jesus' healing of the man's shrivelled hand (Matthew 12:1 – 25). So the healing the centurion's servant is *first*. *Luke*, however, places the healing of the centurion's servant (Luke 7:1 – 10) *after* these same events (Luke 6:1-11). So the healing of the centurion's servant is *second*.

See also pages 59 (man with shrivelled hand) and 62 (centurion's servant) for more on these.

2 Jesus triumphal of Jesus entry into Jerusalem, his clearing/cleansing of the temple and cursing the fig tree: *Matthew* places the clearing of the temple (Matthew 21:12 – 17) immediately *following* the triumphal entry, before the cursing of the fig tree (Matthew 21:18 – 22). So: triumphal entry first, clearing/ cleansing the temple second and cursing the fig tree third. *Mark* places the clearing/cleansing of the temple (Mark 11:15 – 19) on the *same day* after the triumphal entry (Mark: 11:1 – 8) and *after* the cursing of the fig tree (Mark 11:12 – 25). So: triumphal entry first, cursing the fig tree second and clearing/cleansing the temple third.

See pages 77 – 78 (triumphant entry) and page 78 (clearing/cleansing the temple) for more.

Elements whose historical authenticity is *disputed* include:

- 1 the two accounts of the **nativity** of Jesus (Matthew and Mark),
- 2 the miraculous events including the resurrection, and
- 3 certain details about the crucifixion.

For more on these points refer to the website “Gospels and chronology (and contradictions)”.

One thing all the gospels agree on

Virtually all scholars of antiquity agree that **a human Jesus existed**, but scholars differ on the historicity of specific episodes described in the biblical accounts of Jesus. Two events that have "**almost universal assent**" are (1) that Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist and (2) he was crucified by the order of the Roman Prefect Pontius Pilate.

Other websites you might refer to are “Gospels – comparing the four gospels” and “Gospels – historical reliability”, “Synoptic Gospels & the Gospel of John: 7 Key Differences” and “Synoptic Gospels – apparent chronological contradictions”.

We now move on to the life of Jesus. First, his birth and childhood years, followed by his adult years and ministry.

Jesus' Early Years – Birth and Childhood

There are three main people and events in Jesus' early years. These involve:

- 1 John the Baptist,
- 2 Birth and childhood of Jesus, and
- 3 The first visit of Jesus, as a boy (not a baby), to Jerusalem.

1 John the Baptist

First, a few facts about John the Baptist.

John the Baptist is probably one of the most important people in the New Testament. But who was he? What did he do? How did his life intersect with the ministry of Jesus?

For websites that refer to this character, go to “John the Baptist”.

Date of birth

John was born six months before Jesus, also in 4 BC. His mother's name was Elizabeth.

John and Jesus were related – somehow!

Jesus' mother, Mary, and John's mother, Elizabeth, were *relatives* (Luke 1:36, NIV). The old King James Version of the Bible says they were *cousins*, but the word "cousin" used to mean any relative when the KJV was written. Mary and Elizabeth *may* have been cousins, Elizabeth was much older, she might even have been Mary's aunt.

His name

Luke 1:59 “.. and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.” There is no case in the Bible of a child named for a *living* father, and it is certainly unheard of for pious Jews to do so *today*. Perhaps this is the kind of lapse one might expect of a *Gentile* as Luke is considered to be!!

His “title”

John was known as “**the Baptist**” because he called on his followers to go through a ceremony of baptism to demonstrate their repentance for their sins; Jesus began his public life by submitting himself to John's baptism in the River Jordan, about six miles (9.7 km) north of the Dead Sea. *Note:* The exact spot is now inland as the river has changed its course slightly.



A depiction of a person being baptised by John the Baptist in the River Jordan

See also the website “Jesus – baptism.”

An itinerant preacher and its consequence

John the Baptist was one of the many 1st-century AD itinerant preacher in Judea. His primary message was that the *Apocalypse* (i.e. a great catastrophe that results in widespread destruction or the collapse of civilization or the end of the world) was at hand. This type of preaching cannot be separated from the politics of the time because it was essentially a demand for the overturn of a corrupt establishment (e.g. both Roman and that of Herod the Great) through supernatural means.

John's preaching presented a serious challenge to the Roman authority. Further, like such preachers of his day, John had a large following. And unfortunately, large crowds in Judea quite often led to riots, usually against the Roman government.

Josephus described several other itinerant preachers at the time who had followers. The Roman government traditionally arrested the leader, executed him and as many of his followers as they could find. This was also to be the fate of John the Baptist.

His arrest and imprisonment

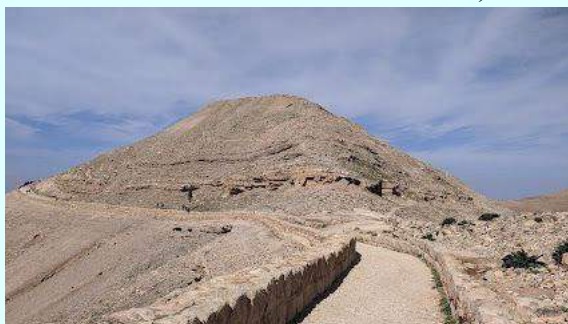
John was arrested and imprisoned by Herod Antipas (son of Herod the Great), the ruler of the province of Galilee. There are two reasons for this:

- 1 Political:** According to Josephus, Herod Antipas was afraid that John might stir up a rebellion and Rome would think he (i.e. Antipas) could not control his province.
- 2 Personal:** John the Baptist had criticised Herod Antipas' illicit marriage to Herodias his brother's wife whom he took first as his mistress then as his second wife (Matthew 14:3 – 5; Mark 6:17 – 20).

Sources cannot agree on an exact date for the imprisonment, but it was probably in AD 27 (Matthew 4:12; Mark 1:14). And according to Josephus, it took place at the **Fortress of Machaerus** located in southern Perea on the eastern side of the Dead Sea (see map below).

His execution

Some time later, at a banquet, Salome (Herodias' daughter) danced at the birthday banquet in honour of her stepfather. So delighted was Herod at her performance that he rashly promised her anything she asked; she asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Herod, not wanting to go back on his promise, and also because this would make him look "strong" in the eyes of the Romans, had John beheaded. Sources again cannot agree on an exact date, this was probably in the years AD 28 – 29 (Matthew 14:1 – 12; Mark 6:14 – 27; Luke 9:9).



Ruins of an ancient fortress, thought to be the site of John the Baptist's imprisonment and execution.



(Left) A painting from the 1530s of Salomé with the head of John the Baptist on a platter.



The location of the fortress at Machaerus in southern Perea.

The birth and childhood of John the Baptist [Luke 1:57 – 80]

Most of what we know about John the Baptist comes from the Gospels. And it is only from **Luke's** gospel that we know anything about his birth.

Luke's gospel announces the coming birth of John the Baptist and that his birth was foretold by an "*angel of the Lord*" (Luke 1:5 – 25). Luke also tells us that in the sixth month of his mother's (Elizabeth) pregnancy, God sent another angel to *Mary*, the relative of Elizabeth (and Jesus' mother), foretelling the birth of Jesus to Mary (Luke 1:26 – 38).

After John's birth, he was to be named Zechariah, after his father, but his mother said, "*No! He is to be called John*" and Zechariah agreed (Luke 1: 59 – 63).

John grew up as an ordinary child in the small village known in those days as the city of *Judah*, about four miles (6.4 km) west of Jerusalem. The most eventful event in his early childhood occurred when he was about six years of age and, in company with his parents, he visited Jesus and his family in Nazareth. After their return from Nazareth, John received an education from his parents, both of whom were educated.

Note: To travel from Judah (near Jerusalem) to Nazareth and back again was a very long journey. The one-way distance between the two places is about 104 km (64 miles). Look at the map on page 47 to get some idea of this. And the walking time each way would take about one week.

2 Birth and childhood of Jesus

(Matthew 1:18 – 25, 2:1 – 12) (Luke 2:1 – 38) *Note:* I am assuming the reader has some knowledge of the birth of Jesus; if not, read these sections in Matthew and Luke.

Neither the birth of Jesus nor his connection with Bethlehem is mentioned in either the Gospel of **Mark** or the Gospel of **John**.

But **Matthew** (Chapters 1 – 2) and **Luke** (Chapters 1 – 2) each relate the circumstances surrounding his miraculous conception, birth, and infancy. Even then they differ in some ways. For example, Matthew has the star and the wise men from the East (Matthew 2:1 – 12); Luke has the stable, manger and the shepherds (Luke 2:8 – 20). Look back at pages 21 – 22.

Matthew has no census, shepherds, or presentation in the temple, and implies that Joseph and Mary were living in *Bethlehem* at the time of the birth. **Luke** has no wise men, flight into Egypt or massacre of the infants, and states that Joseph lived in *Nazareth*.

Matthew's account of the birth [Chapters 1:18 – 25, 2:1 – 22]

Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit so Joseph had in mind to divorce her quietly. However, an angel appeared to him in a dream and told him to take Mary as his wife, because what was conceived in her was from the Holy Spirit. She would give birth to a son, and Joseph was told to give him the name Jesus. They did not consummate their marriage until after the birth (according to verse 25 of Chapter 1).

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of **Herod the Great**, king of Judea. According to Matthew, the birth *had* to be in Bethlehem, which was the city of David, the Old Testament king, and

Joseph's family had descended from David. (Matthew, remember, always links events in the New Testament with prophecies made in the Old Testament – e.g. page 24.) Thus the birth could *not* be in Nazareth as this was not the “City of David”; Bethlehem was (cf. Luke's account below).

Magi (traditionally *wise men*) came from a country somewhere in the East guided by a star that went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the baby Jesus was. They presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Note that in Matthew's account, there was a **star** and the **Magi**, but **no stable, manger or shepherds**.

Note: A **manger** is a trough or an open box in which feed for livestock is placed. A **stable** is a building for the shelter and feeding of certain domestic animals.

The family's escape to Egypt and subsequent return

Being warned in a dream that Herod the Great, king of Judea, was going to search for the child to kill him (as Jesus was to be a “king” and so a threat to Herod), they escaped to safety in Egypt (Matthew 2:13). Matthew writes in verse 15 that this was to fulfil an Old Testament prophecy made by the prophet Hosea: “*Out of Egypt I called my son*” (Hosea 11:1).

After Herod the Great died (4 BC, just after Jesus' birth), the family returned from Egypt to Israel, but because **Archelaus** was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, they were afraid to go there as Archelaus was noted for his violence and cruelty (look back at page 15). But having been warned in a dream, they went north to the district of *Galilee*, and settled in the small town of *Nazareth* (Matthew 2:23). This *supposedly* fulfilled an Old Testament prophecy, that he should be called a Nazarene, though this term does *not* actually refer to a person from Nazareth!



A cave under a church in Egypt (Cairo) where the Holy Family is supposed to have stayed (and which I have also visited!)

Note: We are taking the birth of Jesus to be in **4 BC** (the same year Herod the Great died). Upon his death, **Herod Archelaus** took over but was deposed in AD 6. So, if Jesus was born in 4 BC, then he must have been aged *less* than 10 when the family returned from Egypt as the family returned in the time of Archelaus. (He could even have been just a few months of age – the difference in time from his birth and the death of Herod in the same year of 4 BC. But all this is speculation; the sojourn in Egypt may never even have occurred.

Luke' account [Luke 2:1 – 21 + 22 – 40]

Unlike Matthew's account, there **is a stable, manger and shepherds** in Luke's account, but **no star or Magi**.

Joseph and Mary were living in Nazareth. Because Caesar Augustus, from Rome, had issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world, Joseph with Mary travelled from Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, again, as mentioned by Matthew, as they were descended from David.

There, Mary gave birth to Jesus in a stable as there was no room available for them in an inn. She

wrapped him in **cloths** and placed him in a **manger in the stable**. Shepherds living in fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night (as the Christmas carol goes!) had a vision of the birth and went to Bethlehem to see the newborn baby Jesus.

On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child (as was the Jewish custom), he was taken to the temple and named **Jesus**, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

Note: Luke stresses the fact that Mary was a *virgin*, but this is by no means as clear a statement of the virgin birth as is to be found in Matthew and *might* refer to Mary *before marriage* and that she would conceive after her marriage with Joseph had been consummated in the ordinary manner of conception.

Refer to the website “Jesus – was he really born in Bethlehem?”

Presentation of baby Jesus at the temple (Luke 2:22 – 40):

Forty days after his birth in Bethlehem, Jesus was presented at the temple in **Jerusalem** for, according to the Law of Moses, the Jewish ceremony of purification and dedication was required of every firstborn Jewish male, as Jesus was. Following this, the family returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth where Jesus grew up.

Note: This presentation ceremony is *not* described in the Gospel of Matthew. Also, Luke’s gospel does *not* explicitly state “forty days” though Leviticus 12:1 – 4 in the Old Testament indicates that this event should take place 40 days after the birth of a *male* child,

My questions

- 1 After Jesus’ birth, did the family immediately return to Nazareth *then* go back down to Jerusalem just a few days later for the presentation ceremony 40 days after his birth? As it is a long and often dangerous journey from Jerusalem up through Samaria to Nazareth in Galilee, I guess they remained in Bethlehem or Jerusalem *then* returned to Nazareth.
- 2 Would *every* Jewish newborn male, from all over the nation actually make the prescribed journey to Jerusalem each year given the distance and danger? Somehow, I doubt it.

For more information about the birth of Jesus, refer to the website “Jesus – birth”.

3 Jesus presented in the temple at age 12

[Luke 2:41 – 52] This is the *only* event of the later childhood of Jesus mentioned in the gospels.

Every year Jesus’ parents went to **Jerusalem** for the Jewish Festival of the *Passover*. (The *passover*, remember from the project on *Genesis and Exodus* was when an angel “passed over” the houses of the Israelites in Egypt who had sprinkled the blood of a lamb on the doors thus preventing their firstborn from being killed; the picture, right, is taken from this earlier project).

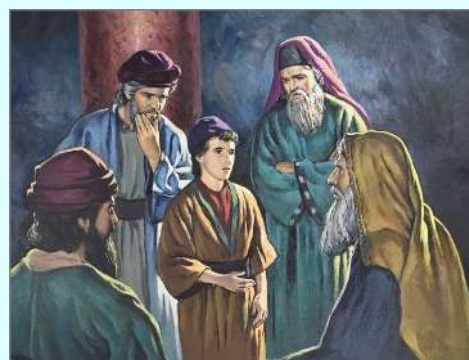


Placing blood on the door of a house

When Jesus **was 12 years old**, they again made this trek to Jerusalem. The purpose was undoubtedly primarily that of fulfilling the requirements of the law, the bringing of Jesus to His confirmation. At this age, a boy himself was supposed to take on the responsibility of learning about the

law but no longer through the instruction of his parents. It was essentially his “coming of age” according to Jewish law. (This rite is still in existence today. It is known as as a *bar mitzvah*, a coming-of-age Jewish religious ritual and family celebration commemorating the religious adulthood of a boy on his 13th birthday.)

As the return journey began, and after three days (!), his parents realised that Jesus was not with their group. So they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. They found him in the temple area sitting among the religious teachers, listening to them, answering their questions, asking them questions and reciting passages from the law. Remarkable for a 12-year old perhaps, but then this is what was/is expected when a boy reaches this age. Then – with Jesus in tow – the family returned to Nazareth.



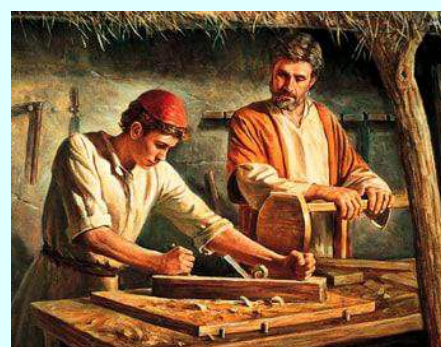
A painting of Jesus in the temple at age 12 discussing with religious leaders

That is all we read about Jesus until he reaches adulthood, sometimes described as “*the missing childhood years*”. He then resurfaces in about **AD 27** at about the age of 31 to begin his ministry as an adult. We look at this soon.

Later childhood

Was Jesus a carpenter?

After returning to Nazareth, it is often *assumed* that Jesus then grew up as a carpenter. His father, Joseph, did appear to be a carpenter. Matthew 13:55 says “*Is not this the carpenter's son?*”. Mark also mentions this; Mark 6:1 – 3 “*... ..Isn't this the carpenter?* “. Luke has no mention of carpentering.



A portrayal of Jesus as a carpenter with his father Joseph

Did Jesus have siblings?

Matthew 13: 55 – 56 “*... Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? ...*” This suggests a normal home life, of Mary as a multiple mother, of Jesus with *four* younger brothers and *several* younger sisters.

My question: We commented earlier (page 26) that Joseph, the father of Jesus, probably died when Jesus was young. If so, how could he be in this picture?

Did Jesus learn to read and write?

We don't know for sure? But probably not.

It has been estimated that the literacy rate in those days was probably less than 3 percent (though for adult males in the main cities might have been 20%, a high rate in an ancient society). So most of the Jewish population could not write or read at all. And that would probably include Jesus. Also a carpenter then was very low on the social ladder and would be unlikely to have received a formal education. The existence of a professional scribal class serves as further evidence that few people in the ancient world could write – the scribes would do their writing for them.

However, there *are* references in the gospels suggesting Jesus was literate. For example, in **Luke 4: 16**

“He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read ...” But the gospels were written many years after Jesus died and the writers were interested in making Jesus someone who would appeal to a Gentile audience as well as a Jewish audience. So being literate was to be part of this!

Jesus also became a great **teacher**. **But a teacher does not have to be able to read and write.** It is possible for very smart people to acquire their knowledge of (biblical) texts from hearing them read aloud (which is how most people “read” in the ancient world: by hearing a text read aloud in a public context).

Further, an intelligent person, which Jesus probably was, would also be able to debate the scriptures with the teachers in the synagogues, which he did (as mentioned on the previous page).

Refer also to websites under “Illiterate peasants” and “Jesus – could he read and write?” and “Jesus – was he literate?”

Jesus’ missing 18 years

We hear nothing about Jesus between the ages of 12 and 30. The unaccounted years are also known as the “Lost Years’ of Jesus Christ” or “Jesus childhood: the missing years” as we know so little about them. It is a biblical puzzle that has baffled scholars and Christians for years.

For more information, look at these websites:

“Jesus – the missing 18 years of his childhood.”

“Education in ancient Israel and Judah.”

The Three-year Ministry of Jesus

As mentioned earlier, we are taking the birth of Jesus to be 4 BC and his death to be in about AD 30. So, using these years, Jesus lived for about 34 years.

The formal ministry of Jesus is believed to have commenced at age about 27 and lasted for **just three years** until his death in AD 30. It is convenient to discuss the ministry in each of these three years. That is:

- Year *One* – c. AD 27 – 28
- Year *Two* – c. AD 28 – 29
- Year *Three* – c. AD 29 – 30

One year or three?

John's gospel mentions Jesus travelling from Galilee to Jerusalem multiple times over **three years** of his *adult* ministry (i.e. not counting visits to Jerusalem as a child). The **Synoptic Gospels** instead present Jesus travelling to Jerusalem only **once** in the final days of his ministry.

Any observant Jewish *adult male* would have visited the city for the **three** main pilgrim festivals (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles – with Passover being the most important) **every year** (John 2:13, 6:4, and 12:1). The three Synoptic Gospels refer to just **one passover**, specifically the Passover at the *end* of Jesus's ministry before he is crucified. The references to **three** passovers in the Gospel of John is why many suggest that a ministry over a period of about three years is correct.

Hence, we take the ministry of Jesus as covering **three** years.

So, as you study the travels of the **adult** Jesus in the following pages and on the maps, note the following that are *only* mentioned in John's gospel:

- **Year 1**, happenings #7 & 8; *First* trip to Jerusalem and surrounding area (only mentioned in John).
- **Year 2**, happening #4; To Jerusalem again (only mentioned in John).
- **Year 3**, happening #16; travelling to Jerusalem the third and final time for the Feast of Tabernacles festival (only mentioned in John).

The synoptic gospels do, of course, need to mention Jesus leaving Galilee for Jerusalem *once*; this is mentioned by Luke in happening #16 on page **73**.

Refer also to the websites on “Jesus – visits to Jerusalem during his adult ministry: how many times? and “Jesus – ministry of” and “Ministry of Jesus (including one year or three)”.

The important of Galilee in Jesus' ministry

Jesus lived in Nazareth in the province of Galilee. So perhaps naturally, most of the happenings in the *first* year of his ministry would take place in Galilee. However, much of Jesus' *three-year* ministry *also* took place in the Galilee area. Take a quick look at the three maps below of Jesus' ministry in these three years. Can you see that most of his three-year ministry was spent in Galilee and the surrounding region?

Why was this? The main reason was because of differences between Galilee and Judea.

Differences Between Galilee and Judea in the time of Jesus

Modern readers of the New Testament often know little about the geopolitical world of first-century Palestine. It is commonly assumed that “the Jews” were the same community living amicably in the part

of the world we now call “the Holy Land”. But this was *not* so!

The northern province of Galilee was decisively distinct – in history, political status, and culture – from the southern province of Judea, which contained the holy city of Jerusalem. Here are seven key differences:

1 *Racial differences:* Ever since the Assyrian conquest in the 8th century BC, there was a very mixed population in Galilee. Close to the more conservative *Jewish* areas (such as Nazareth and Capernaum) there were cities that were largely *pagan* of which the city of Tiberias on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee was a chief example.

[Tiberias: Built in AD 20 (a decade before Jesus began his ministry) by Herod Antipas who named it after the then-reigning Roman emperor Tiberius, and Antipas made it his own capital. Look back at the map on page 6 (and on page 35) for the location of Tiberias. Note the different spelling of the *city* of Tiberias and *Emperor* Tiberius.]

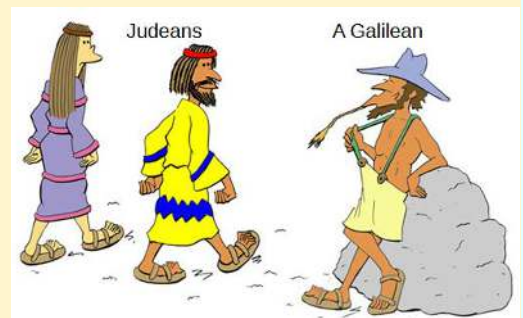
2 *Geographic differences:* Galilee was separated from Judea by the *non-Jewish* territory of Samaria, and from Perea in the south-east by Greek towns and settlements in Decapolis. [Decapolis: (meaning “ten cities”) During Greek times. Greek cities were built everywhere that Alexander the Great and his armies trod and this region east of the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee came to be studded with Greek towns.]

3 *Political differences:* Politically, Galilee had been under separate rule from Judea during almost all its history since the 10th century BC (apart from a period of “reunification” under the Maccabees). In the time of Jesus, Galilee was under the rule of Herod Antipas, who reigned from 4 BC to AD 39 and so reigned during the whole life of Jesus (cf. map on page 6 again).

4 *Economic differences:* Galilee offered better agricultural and fishing resources than the more mountainous territory of Judea, making the wealth of some Galileans the envy of those in the south.

5 *Cultural differences:* Judeans despised their northern neighbours as “country bumpkins” (i.e. unsophisticated people from a rural area of a country). Their lack of Jewish sophistication being compounded by their greater openness to Greek influence. Perhaps the folks in Judea were rather snobbish!

6 *Linguistic differences:* Galileans spoke a distinctive form of Aramaic whose slovenly consonants (they dropped their “aitches”, that is, to *not* pronounce the letter ‘h’ at the beginning of words in which it should be pronounced) and were the butt of Judean humour.



The Galileans were regarded as "country bumpkins"

Matthew 26:73 is often quoted that Peter’s denial of Christ contains reference to a distinct Galilean accent: “*After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, “Surely you are one of them; your **accent** gives you away.”* (Others however refer not to Peter's accent but rather to the excessive nature of his speech in denying association with Jesus.)

Refer also to the website “Peter’s Galilean accent”.

7 **Religious differences:** The Judean opinion was that Galileans, while adhering to orthodox Judaism, were lax in their observance of proper Jewish ritual, and the problem was exacerbated by the distance of Galilee from the temple in Jerusalem and the religious leadership, which was concentrated in Jerusalem (which might answer my earlier question, page 38, as to whether people far from Jerusalem would actually travel there).

Note: While the Judeans and Galileans followed orthodox Judaism, the Idumeans (in Idumea, south of Judea) also accepted Judaism (in some cases at the point of the sword). However, despite their observance of the “proper” religion, Idumeans were still viewed as Edomites, descendants of Esau, and therefore the hereditary enemies of the Jewish descendants of Jacob. And Samaria (between Judea and Galilee) retained a non-Jewish religion regarded as heretical following its re-population by the Assyrians after their invasion of Israel in the 8th century BC (see page 8 earlier).

The result of these differences was that the *Jewish Galilean in 1st century Jerusalem was not among his own people*. His accent would immediately mark him out as “*not one of us*.” So the supposedly superior culture of Jerusalem would not even regard Jesus as a prophet, let alone as the “Messiah,” which everyone knew must come from Bethlehem in Judea (and not Galilee)! (See John 4:40 – 44.)

Perhaps also look look at the websites “Galilee” and “Seven Differences Between Galilee and Judea in the Time of Jesus” (from which the above notes are taken).

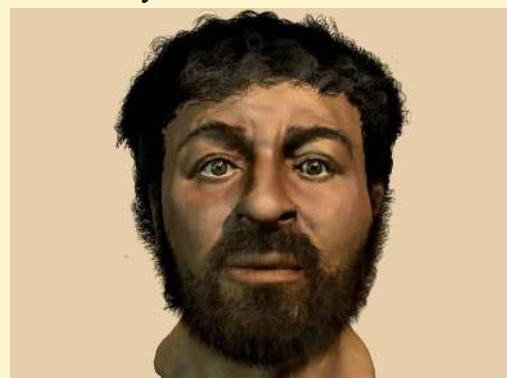
What did Jesus look like?

The above comments give information about Jesus as a Galilean. But now we look at the question as to what Jesus, and perhaps other first-century Galilean men, looked like. Jesus didn’t spend time with those who were rich, respected and dressed up in fine clothes. He spent his time with the people that nobody wanted to be around!

The first point is that Jesus was **not** a pale light-skinned, blue-eyed man with long fair hair and a beard as is often portrayed by Western artists and which are found in many churches.



Definitely NOT what Jesus would have looked like



Possibly what a first-century Galilean man might have looked like

Modern research reveals a more accurate depiction of Jesus. In 2001, experts in facial reconstruction used modern science to recreate the face of a first-century man like Jesus. Using an Israeli skull dating back to the first century and with computer programs, clay, and knowledge of historical Jewish and Middle Eastern features, they created a face that **might** have hypothetically belonged to a man of the time.

The image (above right) shows the face they reconstructed. It looks nothing like the Jesus depicted in European art. Instead, it shows a man with tan, olive-toned skin. He has dark, curly hair cropped close to his head and a short beard as Jesus probably had. Jesus also likely had a lean, muscular look thanks to his work as a carpenter before his ministry began and from all of the walking he did.

Further, some experts say that Jesus was likely not a particularly handsome man. Had Jesus been handsome, the gospel writers might have commented on his looks.

We will probably never know exactly what Jesus looked like. But modern reconstructions based on science and historical texts probably come much closer than any artistic interpretations.

This depiction (right) of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well from John 4:7 – 26 is probably closer to what he actually looked like.

For more on what Jesus may have look like, refer to the websites on “Jesus – what did he look like?”



Is this a more accurate depiction of what Jesus might have looked like?

How long to walk from Galilee to Jerusalem?

The principal locations for the ministry undertaken by Jesus were Galilee and Judea, with activities also taking place in surrounding areas such as Perea and Samaria. The distance from Galilee to Judea by travelling through Samaria is about 150 – 200 km. The standard mode of transport was usually by foot with an estimated mileage of around 32 km (20 miles) a day, but citizens also rode on oxen, donkeys and camels. A determined person, on a mission, could make the trip from Judea to Galilee (150 – 200 km) on foot in six days, allowing for overnight rests on the way. (Today you can drive between the two places in about 2.5 hours.) But it was a long and dangerous journey back then; look back at page 39.

Based on Christian texts, it has been estimated that Jesus walked more than 3,000 miles during his three-year ministry. Refer to the websites on “Jesus – how far did he walk?”

Roman rule and roads: During the time of Jesus’ teachings, Judea was under Roman rule. This was a dangerous time, especially when travelling, even in Judea and Galilee where robbery and murders were common. Ironically the Romans did more to facilitate travel than any other empire as they constructed major roads and cleared the seas of pirates. The Pax Romana (Roman Peace) declared by Emperor Augustus (reigned 27 BC – AD 14) enabled people to travel *relatively* safely. (Look back at page 16.)



Part of the road from Jerusalem to Jericho

In the time of Jesus, the road from Jerusalem to Jericho (setting for the Good Samaritan parable) was notorious for its danger and difficulty, and was known as the "Way of Blood" because "of the blood which was often shed there by robbers". Jericho is just 24 km (15 miles) north-east of Jerusalem and can be walked in about seven hours (assuming no hold-ups along the way!)

The First Year of Jesus' Ministry: AD 27 – 28

What happened and where?

Jesus lived in Nazareth in Galilee. So perhaps naturally, most of the happenings in this *first* year of his ministry occurred in Galilee. Indeed, as we have mentioned, much of Jesus' three-year ministry took place in the Galilee area.

The map on the next page shows where the *believed* first-year happenings occurred – most in the *Galilee* area, with a few in *Judea* (including *Jerusalem*) and one – just one – in *Samaria*. In addition, two events occur in the village of Bethany-across-the-Jordan (also known as Bethany-*beyond*-the-Jordan) in the region of *Perea*. The 11 numbers on the map are shown in the possible sequence of the places which Jesus visited in this first year of his ministry:

Galilee

1 Living in Nazareth in Galilee.

Perea and Judea

2 Bethany-across-the-Jordan – appearance of John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus

3 Nearby desert/wilderness of Judea – the temptation of Jesus

4 Back to near Bethany-across-the-Jordan again – Jesus calls his first disciples

Back to Galilee

5 Back north to Cana in Galilee – wedding and miracle

6 Capernaum – with Mary, brothers, etc., begins to preach and calls Matthew the tax collector

Judea again

7 South to Jerusalem, in Judea – passover, money-changers

8 To countryside of Judea north of Jerusalem – Jesus' disciples baptise believers

Back to Galilee via Samaria

9 At Sychar in Samaria – woman at the well

Galilee

10 Back again to Cana in Galilee – healing of an official's son

11 Back to Nazareth (and “home”!) – rejected by people there

About equal numbers of appearances in the Galilee region and Jerusalem region but only one in Samaria – remember that Samaria was not Jewish and, if possible, was to be avoided by devout Jews.

Note: The above sequence may not be fully correct. As mentioned earlier, there were no (newspaper) reporters to tell us exactly when events happened. Like the birth of Jesus, the gospels give different accounts of his ministry. The gospel writers wrote many years after the time of Jesus and as they were more concerned with a *message to different audiences* about Jesus and not about an accurate chronology or history, the places visited don't always agree.

Some of the happenings are mentioned in all four gospels, some in three gospels and some in just one gospel.



Travels and happenings in detail: **Year One AD 27-28**

The events of Jesus' ministry begin, *not* with Jesus himself, but with the appearance of John the Baptist in Bethany-across-the-Jordan and the baptism of Jesus (#2 on the map). So that is where we start.

[As we discuss the happenings, the reader should refer to the gospels, either a hard copy or online. For online, the NIV versions are referred to in this project.]

1 & 2 (a) Appearance of John the Baptist

Gospel references: Matthew 3:1 – 12; Mark 1:2 – 8; Luke 3:1 – 20; John 1:6 – 28

[Mentioned in all four gospels]

John the Baptist arrives on the scene, preaching in the Judean desert near the Dead Sea at Bethany-across-the-Jordan and baptising people in the River Jordan. He proclaims: "*You must change your hearts – for*

the kingdom of Heaven has arrived!" Matthew, as he usually does in his gospel, links this event to happenings in the Old Testament such as linking words spoken by the prophet Isaiah to the appearance of John the Baptist "*The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight*" (Isaiah 40:3). Mark and Luke also refer to this (Mark 1:3, Luke 3:4). This is what triggered the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

The people of Jerusalem and of all Judea and the Jordan district flocked to John the Baptist, and were baptised by him in the river Jordan, publicly confessing their sins.

Luke also includes some current context, including that John the Baptist appeared in the 15th year of the reign of the Roman Emperor Tiberius and when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea and Herod Antipas ruled over Galilee and Perea, as well as the kinds of people who came to be baptised. Luke also comments how Herod Antipas locked up John the Baptist in prison for rebuking Herod because of his adulterous marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done (Luke 3:19 – 20). Refer also to page 36.

John (the gospel writer) comments how John the Baptist replies when Jewish religious leaders came to ask who he was. He denied he was the Messiah/Christ or Elijah the prophet, but that he was there to announce a greater one who was to come after him (that is, Jesus).

(b) Baptism of Jesus

Gospel references: Matthew 3:13 – 17; Mark 1:9 – 11; Luke 3:21 – 3a; John 1:29 – 34

[Again, mentioned in all four gospels]

This is the time when *Jesus* begins his ministry by leaving his home town of **Nazareth** to go down to **Bethany-across-the- Jordan** to be baptised by John the Baptist in the River Jordan (see above map again). Jesus was about 31 years old at this time.

All four gospels describe what happens as soon as Jesus is baptised, how the heavens open and the Holy Spirit descends and settles on Jesus and announces how God is pleased with what has taken place.

3 Jesus' temptation by the Devil

Gospel references: Matthew 4:1 – 11; Mark 1:12 – 13; Luke 4:1 – 13

[Not mentioned in John's gospel]

The three gospel writers describe that after his baptism, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the desert (area #3 on the map), just west of the River Jordan, to be tempted by the devil (Satan). All three gospels state how Jesus fasted there for 40 days and nights while Satan tempted him. Matthew and Luke add in addition that after this time, Jesus was very hungry (understandably!). *Note:* The number "40" again; a very important number in the Bible. (Keep a note of this as you continue to read the text.)



A drawing of Jesus in the desert during his temptation

Matthew and Luke, but not Mark, describe three temptations and how Jesus responded.

1 First, the devil says that if Jesus is the Son of God, he should command stones to turn into loaves of bread. Jesus refuses.

2 Jesus is then “taken” to the highest ledge of the Temple (in Jerusalem) and told to jump off and that if he is the Son of God, he will not be hurt. Jesus again refuses.

3 Jesus is then taken up a high mountain, and from there shown all the kingdoms of the world and their magnificence and told that everything there will be given to him if he will fall down and worship the devil. Again, Jesus resists the temptation.



A drawing of Jesus being tempted to jump off the temple in Jerusalem

Throughout the rest of the Gospels, Jesus does not hesitate to identify the devil, or Satan, and his demons as real beings continually trying to thwart the goodness and love of God. They totally oppose Jesus' own teaching and healing.

John the Baptist imprisoned and executed: Sometime after baptising Jesus, John the Baptist was imprisoned by Herod Antipas for denouncing his marriage, which was illegal under Jewish Law because she had previously been married to his own brother, Philip! According to Scripture, Herod's stepdaughter Salome *later* requested John's head to please her mother, Herodias. John's execution *may* have been a year or so following his arrest. (See also page 36.)

While Jesus was in Perea, Jesus is told that Herod Antipas was thinking of killing him as well as John the Baptist.

How long was John the Baptist in prison?

John's gospel suggests Jesus' ministry included *four* Passovers, with the last of them being the Passover when Jesus was crucified. The *synoptic* gospels place John the Baptist's death just before the feeding of the 5,000 and John's gospel places that event around the time of the third Passover in Jesus' ministry (John 6:4). So that would make it almost exactly one year before Jesus died.

We know that at the time of the *first Passover* in Jesus' ministry, John the Baptist had not yet been imprisoned (John 3:24). So he was in prison for less than two years. It was probably not much less than two years, because the next event recorded in John's gospel is Jesus returning to Galilee (John 4:3) which Matthew says was prompted by John's imprisonment (Matthew 4:12). So there is good evidence that John was in prison for nearly two years — beginning just after the first Passover in Jesus ministry and ending a year before Jesus died.

Refer also to the websites on “John the Baptist – imprisonment” and John the Baptist – execution”.

4 Jesus starts his ministry: calling his first disciples

Gospel references: Matthew 4:18 – 22; Mark 1:16 – 20; Luke 5:1 – 11; John 1:35 – 51

[Mentioned in all four gospels]

Following his temptation, Jesus starts his ministry by calling the first of his disciples. This is a key

episode in the life of Jesus and took place (*perhaps!!*) in the first year of his ministry. The accounts of the calling of the first disciples are described in all four of the gospels but are somewhat confusing as they *differ* as to *where* the calling occurs. Also, there seems to confusion was to *when* they were called with the *six* referred to below occurring in the first year of Jesus' ministry and the others in the *second* year of his ministry, that is, AD 28 – 29 (as described later on page 60).

- (a) In **John's gospel**, Jesus returns to the River Jordan near **Bethany-across-the-Jordan** (nowadays named *Bethabara*) where he was baptised. He calls the two brothers **Andrew** and **Simon Peter** who were already disciples of John the Baptist (John 1:35 – 51). They decide to follow Jesus. Then, after Jesus returns to **Galilee**, he calls two more – **Philip** and **Nathanael** (John 1:43 – 51).
- (b) In **Matthew**, and **Mark**, Jesus *first* returns north to the **Galilee** area where the call of the disciples occurs on the **Sea of Galilee** while they are fishing in the lake. First Jesus calls **Philip**, **Andrew** and **Simon Peter**, all of whom were fishermen from the Galilean town of Bethsaida. Then Jesus calls **James** and **John**.
- (c) In **Luke**, on the Sea of **Galilee**, Jesus calls **Simon Peter** though indirectly as a *fisher of people* (Luke 5:10). **James** and **John**, Simon's partners, are also mentioned in the text but are *not* called (Luke 5:10). However, in Luke 5:11 it says "*they*" followed him, so does that include James and John as well as Simon Peter?

So in total, the gospels relate the calling of the first *six* of Jesus' disciples – Andrew, Simon (called Peter), Philip, Nathanael, James and John. And some are called in different places in different gospels.

Note: Nathanael, from **Cana**, was a disciple of Jesus, but is mentioned *only* in Chapters 1 and 21 of the Gospel of *John*. Little is written about him the New Testament but most Bible scholars believe Nathanael was also named Bartholomew, who *is* listed later as one of the 12 disciples.

For more, refer also to the websites on "Jesus – calling of the disciples".

"Sea" of Galilee

It is important to note that the designation "**Sea**" of Galilee is something of a misnomer. By definition, a "**sea**" is a **saltwater body**. The Sea of Galilee is a freshwater **lake**. It is fed by numerous freshwater springs from beneath its surface but primarily from the Jordan River which flows into it from the north and out of it from the south. The Jordan brings rainwater and snow melt water down from Mount Hermon and the region that today is called the Golan Heights. [View the map below on page 56 and locate Mt. Hermon north-west of Caesarea Philippi.]



View of the southern part of the Sea of Galilee

5 Back to Galilee, to Cana – wedding and first miracle

Gospel reference: John 2:1 – 11

[Mentioned only in John's gospel]

Jesus returns to Galilee to the town of Cana (map reference #5) where a **wedding** was taking place. Jesus' mother was there. Jesus and his disciples were invited to the festivities. Then it happened that the supply

of wine gave out, and Jesus' mother told him, "*They have no more wine.*" Jesus then performs his **first** recorded **miracle** by changing water into wine. This demonstrated Jesus' power and his disciples believed in him. (*Note: The second miracle is the healing an official's dying son later in this first year of his ministry (John 4:43) – see #10 below.*)

6 Then to Capernaum – for a rest and begins to preach

Gospel references: Matthew 4:12 – 17; John 2:12

[Mentioned in just these two gospels]

After the wedding at Cana, Jesus continues on to Capernaum on the northern-western shore of the Sea of Galilee with his mother (Mary), his brothers and disciples, and stayed there a few days (John 2:12)

My question

How Jesus' brothers suddenly turn up is not mentioned?
Perhaps they were also with Mary and the disciples in Cana!!



Aerial view of the ruins of ancient Capernaum on the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee

And according to the gospel of Matthew, in Capernaum and from that time on Jesus began to preach "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.*" (Matthew 4:17).

Note 1: According to Matthew, this event occurred *after* Jesus called his first disciples, and after he had heard that John the Baptist had been put in prison (as mentioned above). This again illustrates that the four gospels do not always agree on the order in which events happen, but as said earlier, precise chronology of events was not their reason for writing their gospels.

Note 2: Chronologically, the first mention of Capernaum in the Bible is here after the wedding and miracle. It is found in John 2:12.

Note 3: It *may have been* at this time in Capernaum, near the start of his ministry, that Jesus called **Matthew the tax collector to become a disciple**. This calling is mentioned in the *three synoptic* gospels – Matthew 9:9 – 13; Mark 2:13 – 17; Luke 5:27 – 32. (Also look back at page **23** for the possible calling of Matthew.) Or, the calling of Matthew may have occurred in Year 2 – we are not sure.

7 & 8 First adult visit by Jesus to Jerusalem and surrounding countryside

Gospel references: John 2:11 – 23; John 3:1 – 21; John 3:22 – 36

[Mentioned only in John's gospel]

Jesus now travels south to Jerusalem for the **Passover** – the first Passover mentioned in the Gospels. There he drives the money-changers from the Temple for the **first** time. He also meets the Pharisee, Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. During their conversation Jesus mentions what is one of the most well-known verses in the New Testament:

John 3:16 "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*"

After this, Jesus leaves for the countryside of Judea (somewhere north of Jerusalem) where his disciples baptise believers (John 3:22 – 36).

Who is right?

The Gospel of John (above) states that Jesus cleared/cleansed the temple *early* in His ministry, but the other Gospels place the temple-cleansing near the *end* of His ministry (see page 78). Who is right? Or did Jesus cleanse the temple twice? Have a look at websites on “Jesus – how many times did he cleanse the temple?”

9 Samaria – woman at the well

Gospel reference: John 4:1 – 42

[Mentioned only in John’s gospel]

Jesus and his disciples then proceed northwards from Judea back to Galilee, passing through the territory of Samaria. Near Sychar, a town in Samaria (where Jacob’s well was), Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at the well and asks her for a drink of water. The woman’s reply is significant: “*You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?*” (for Jews did not associate with Samaritans on religious grounds, just as they tended to look down on Galileans – see pages 42 – 44 again). Even Jesus’ disciples enquired why Jesus was talking to her.



A depiction of Jesus talking to the Samaritan woman at the well

Many Samaritans believed in Jesus because of this woman’s testimony (John 4:39), after which Jesus and his disciples continued on to Cana in Galilee (John 4:43).

This story is mentioned only in John’s gospel. Here, in the most Gentile of the gospels, Jesus is depicted as speaking freely to a Samaritan woman (something at which his disciples are shocked). This fits John’s belief that Jesus has come to save *all* people, and not the Jews alone.

10 Back to Galilee – to Cana again in Galilee – healing of an official’s son

Gospel reference: John 4:43 – 54

[Mentioned only in John’s gospel]

Jesus and his disciples continue north through Samaria and arrive back in Cana, where a royal official in nearby *Capernaum*, whose son who lays sick and close to death came to *Cana* and begged Jesus to come and heal his son. Jesus just told him to return as he (Jesus) had already healed his son.

11 Then to Nazareth – and rejection

Gospel references: Matthew 4:12 – 14; Mark 1:14; Luke 4:14 – 31

[Not mentioned in John’s gospel]

From Cana Jesus returns to his home-town of *Nazareth*, and preaches in the synagogue where he *read* (!) from the prophet Isaiah and proclaimed that *he* was the Messiah that he was reading about in Isaiah. This infuriated the people in the synagogue who drove him out of town and wanted to kill him. This was the first time Jesus was rejected in his home town. (*Note:* Jesus is again rejected in Nazareth at the start of the *third* year of his ministry (AD 29 – 30) – see below, page 66.) (Also look back at page 40 whether Jesus could read.) According to the gospel references, *Jesus then moves to Capernaum* (Luke 4:16 – 31).

Why did Jesus move to – and live in – Capernaum?

Jesus moved to Capernaum from his home town of Nazareth at the end of the first year of his ministry. Capernaum became his home and the many versions of the Bible call it Jesus' "own city" or "own town" or similar. For example: **Matthew 4:13 (NIV version)** "Leaving Nazareth, he went and *lived in Capernaum*; **Matthew 9:1 (KJV version)** "And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his *own city*." Capernaum became the centre of Jesus' Galilean ministry, and was also the place of his longest residence.

There are several possible reasons that prompted this move:

1 First, after speaking in the synagogue in Nazareth and being **rejected** by a mob who, enraged by his words, especially his Messianic claims, attempted to throw him off the brow of the large hill. Jesus easily escaped the mob (Luke 4: 16 – 31). In the last verse, we read "Then he went down to Capernaum," So, he was seeking a place of acceptance of his gospel. (Note: He actually went *up* to Capernaum and not *down* as Capernaum is north-east of Nazareth – refer to map above.)



Ruins of a synagogue in ancient Capernaum

2 A reason, at least according to Matthew, was to **fulfil Bible prophecy** (Matthew 4:12 – 14 NIV): "When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and *lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali to fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah ...*" As mentioned earlier, Matthew, of all the gospel writers, tried to explain things about Jesus in terms of Old Testament prophecy.

3 Another *possible* reason may have been the report that **John the Baptist** had been arrested by Herod Antipas (**Matthew 4:12; Mark 1:14**). He might have wanted to move further away from the attention of Herod because Nazareth was close to Sepphoris (6 km north-west of Nazareth), the provincial capital of Herod Antipas (before he moved his capital to Tiberias). However, while Jesus may have learnt about the arrest here, it was probably *not* a major reason for moving. Also, the reference in Mark 1:14 refers to moving to Galilee following his baptism and temptation at the *start* of his ministry: "After John [the baptist] was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee..." They can't all be right!!

4 However, the reason may have been more **practical**. Capernaum was a larger and more important centre than Nazareth. Living by the Sea of Galilee meant that Jesus was just a short boat ride away from a number of Jewish communities that lined the lake. Further, Capernaum occupied a strategic location on an important ancient highway (the "Via Maris" meaning "Way of the Sea"). Traffic from all over the ancient world would have to pass through Capernaum every day. This helped facilitate the spread of Jesus' message and the fame of his ministry. It would serve as a springboard to the world in a way that the remote,



The modern "Via Maris" highway located a few kilometres north of Capernaum

unconnected community of Nazareth never could.

In addition, the early disciples of Jesus such as Andrew and John, whom John the Baptist had introduced to Jesus (John 1:36 – 40), and their brothers Simon Peter and James were fishermen at Capernaum (which is on the shores of the Sea of Galilee) and they might have invited Jesus to their town for his stay and his preaching.

- 5 Capernaum was highly populated compared to a very low population in Nazareth. It consisted of Jews and Gentiles who were farmers, fishermen, or travellers. Unlike the people of Nazareth and the conservative leaders in Jerusalem who were against the preaching of Jesus and could not accept him as the promised Messiah, the people of Capernaum were open-minded and receptive to the revolutionary ideas of Jesus. Hence, Capernaum was the better place for his ministry.

Note: Although this move to Capernaum is described above as being near the end of Jesus' first year of ministry (AD 27), it could be at the start of the second year of his ministry (AD 28). But this is a minor point!

Today the town of Kfar Nahum (Talhum in Arabic) stands where Capernaum once stood.

For more on Capernaum, visit the websites under "Capernaum". And for Jesus' move to Capernaum, look at the first website in the list.

The Second Year of Jesus' Ministry: AD 28-29

What happened and where?

The map on the next page shows where happenings occurred – unlike Year One, all but one in this second year occurred in the *Galilee* area (including *Decapolis*) with only one outside the region, which was in *Jerusalem*. The happenings start and end in Capernaum in Galilee.

The 11 numbers on the map show the *possible* sequence of the places Jesus stayed in and visited in this second year:

Galilee

- 1 **Capernaum** – healing a **madman** in synagogue, calling disciples, healing Peter's mother-in-law of her **fever**
- 2 Around the Galilee region preaching and healing, including healing of a **leper**
- 3 Back to Capernaum – healing a **paralysed man** after healing a madman of Gadarene

Judea

- 4 To Jerusalem for a *second* **passover**, and **healing a crippled man**

Back to Galilee

- 5 Back to Galilee area – healing a man with **shrivelled hand**, **dumb & blind man** and many others
- 6 Near Capernaum – selects **12 apostles** and delivers the **Sermon on the Mount/Sermon on the plain**
- 7 To Capernaum again – heals a **Roman centurion's servant**
- 8 To **Nain** in Galilee – preaching and brings the **widow's son** back to life
- 9 Second Galilee tour with 12 apostles and some women helpers; delivers the parable of the sower
- 10 Sea of Galilee (a) **calms a storm** and (b) Decapolis region; heals another **madman**, and pigs
- 11 Back to Capernaum. Heals a **paralysed man**, raises **Jairus' daughter** from the dead, **bleeding woman**, two **blind men** and the **dumb man**

Refer to the map which clearly shown how most of the places visited in this second year are in Galilee, with just one outside visit to Jerusalem. And, of the 10 places up north, *four are in Capernaum* (or *five if #6 which is “near Capernaum” is included*).

At the end of Year One of Jesus' ministry, we find him back in Nazareth in Galilee, from where the second year of his ministry begins. And most of this second year is spent in the Galilee region with just two journeys out of it, one to Jerusalem and the other to the region of Decapolis, located to the south-east of Galilee.

Note: Jesus preached in Decapolis – this may have included preaching to Gentiles (as historically, Greeks lived there). In view of the later history of Christianity, the fact that Jesus' preaching may have spread among Greeks, and Gentiles generally, is of extreme importance.

Again, as in Year One, some of the happenings are mentioned in all four gospels, some in three gospels and some in just one gospel.



Travels and happenings in detail: **Year Two AD 28-29**

1 Capernaum

Gospel references: [See below for each happening]

Following his **rejection** in Nazareth, Jesus moves to Capernaum. According to the *Synoptic Gospels*, Jesus heals a madman in the synagogue, heals Peter's mother-in-law of her fever, and calls his first disciples – perhaps only now to *full-time* service.

1. The madman in the synagogue: Mark 1:21 – 28; Luke 4:31 – 37

In the synagogue, a man in the grip of an evil spirit (i.e. the madman) appeared in the synagogue shouting out, "*What have you got to do with us, Jesus from Nazareth? Have you come to kill us? I know who you are – you're God's holy one!*" Jesus cut him short and told the evil spirit sharply to hold his tongue and get out of him! At this the evil spirit convulsed the man, let out a loud scream and left him. Everyone present

was so astounded at what they had witnessed.

2. Peter's mother-in-law of her fever: Matthew 8:14 – 17; Mark 1:29 – 34; Luke 4:38 – 41

In Peter's house in Capernaum, Jesus saw that Peter's mother-in-law had been put to bed with a high fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her. (*Note:* In Matthew's account, the house was that of Peter and Andrew.)

3. Calling his disciples into full-time service: Matthew 4:18 – 22; Mark 1:16 – 20; Luke 5:1 – 11; John 1:43 – 50. [Mentioned in all four gospels]

On page 50, in *John's* gospel, we saw the calling of Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathanael by Jesus, to be disciples following his temptation at the start of his ministry in Year One. After the *initial* calls in John's Gospel, it is possible that only *now* does Jesus appear to bring his disciples into *full-time* service. This happens by the Sea of Galilee (which is right next to Capernaum – see map)

2 Around Galilee – healing the leper

Gospel references: Matthew 8:1 – 4; Mark 1:40 – 45; Luke 5:12 – 16

[Mentioned in just these three gospels]

Note: In Matthew, this incident occurs *after* the Sermon on the Mount. In Mark, it occurs as Jesus was preaching and healing throughout Galilee. In Luke, it occurs in one of the towns of Galilee after the calling of Simon Peter, Andrew, John and James (possibly in Capernaum). A leper came to Jesus, knelt in front of him and appealed to him, "*If you want to, you can make me clean.*" Immediately he was clear of the leprosy.

Don't tell anyone – why not?

In Mark's account, after healing the leper, Jesus tells him not to tell anyone. (Mark 1:44 "*See that you don't tell this to anyone...*") Jesus often did this – the question is "Why?"

To our way of thinking, it would seem that Jesus would *want* everyone to know about the miracle. But Jesus knew that publicity over such miracles might hinder His mission and divert public attention from His message. Mark records that this is exactly what happened. In this man's excitement over his being miraculously healed, he disobeyed. As a result, Jesus had to move His ministry away from the city and into the desert regions (Mark 1:45) "*As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to Him from everywhere.*"

Also, Jesus did not want people focusing on the miracles He performed, but rather the *message* He proclaimed and the death He was going to die. The same is true today. God would rather that we be focused on the healing miracle of *salvation* through Jesus Christ instead of focusing on his physical healing and/or miracles.

Further, in the synoptic gospels, Jesus is pictured as being careful during this early part of his ministry to avoid arousing the suspicion of the authorities with respect to his Messianic status. Both the religious and secular leaders would strike quickly at those they considered were falsely claiming to be the Messiah, since such false Messiahs could stir up revolts and result in much damage.

For more, refer to website "Do not tell anyone."

3 Back in Capernaum – healing a paralysed man

Gospel references: Matthew 9:1 – 8; Mark 2:1 – 12; Luke 5:17 – 26

[Mentioned in just these three gospels]

In Capernaum, some people brought to Jesus a paralysed man lying flat on his bed. After first telling him his sins are forgiven, Jesus tells the man to pick up his bed and go home. Some religious officials – Pharisees and Scribes – accused Jesus of blasphemy for saying he could forgive sins.

The Sadducees, Pharisees and Scribes

1. **Sadducees:** These were a Jewish religious group that accepted the Jewish *written* law. They did *not* accept the doctrines of resurrection and an afterlife of reward and punishment.



The dress of the Sadducees

2. **Pharisees:** This Jewish religious group accepted *not only* the *written* Law itself *but also* the *oral* traditions that had grown up about it.

They tended to be milder in practice than the Sadducees because oral tradition often softened the harsh letter of the Mosaic Law. Pharisaic teaching at its *best* resembles that of the New Testament. At its *worst*, though, the Pharisees evolved so many trivial rites as an adjunct to religion. Many were entirely given over to the belief that salvation lay in the meticulous observation of all the precepts of the Law as interpreted in the most stringent manner. In our own language, the word "*pharisaical*" is applied to a self-conscious and hypocritical sanctimoniousness. While all this was undoubtedly true of many Pharisees, it was certainly not true of all.



How Pharisees dressed

3. **Scribes:** The scribes were *students* of the Law and tended to be wedded rather inflexibly to ritual. For this reason, the Scribes and the Pharisees are often coupled in the gospels, as groups who separately and together opposed Jesus. The literal meaning of a scribe is "*one who writes*," a secretary. Thus a scribe is bound to the letter and, in fact, has a vested interest in the preservation of the letter since only by its exact knowledge does he fulfil his function. (Look back at page 40 for mention of the scribes.)

As Jesus' fame grew, it attracted the attention of the Scribes and Pharisees, and they disapproved. Social prejudice may well have been involved. After all, Jesus was merely an unlearned carpenter from some small town – some “backwoods preacher”, some “country bumpkin” (see page 43 again).

4 To Jerusalem – healing a crippled man

Gospel reference: John 5:1 – 15

[Mentioned only in this gospel]

Jesus now journeys south from Galilee to *Jerusalem* for a festival – possibly for another passover (which would make it the *second* passover mentioned in the gospels). Here, at a pool known as the “Pool of *Bethesda*”, many sick people were in the habit of lying; some of them were blind, some lame, and some had withered limbs. (They used to wait there for the “moving of the water”, because at certain times an angel would come down into the pool and disturb the water, and then the first person who stepped into the

water after the disturbance would be healed of whatever he was suffering from). Jesus saw a crippled man, who had nobody to put him in the pool, and healed him. The man did not know who Jesus was, but shortly after, Jesus met him in the temple and commented “*Do not sin again or something worse might happen to you!*”

5 Back to Galilee region – more healing

Gospel references: Matthew 12:9 – 14; Mark 3:1 – 6; Luke 6:6 – 11 (and many others Matthew 12:15; Mark 3:7) [Mentioned in just these three gospels]

These miracles occurred after Jesus returned to Galilee following his visit to Jerusalem.

1. Healing the man with the shrivelled hand:

In the Galilee region, Jesus went into a synagogue (possibly in Capernaum, though not mentioned), where there happened to be a man with a shrivelled hand. Again, the Pharisees were angry that Jesus had healed on this day, which happened to be the *Sabbath* day (which was against their strict rules) and discussed how they could get rid of Jesus altogether.

The name "*Sabbath*"

Sabbath is derived from a Hebrew word meaning "to break off" or "to desist." The worldly purpose of the Sabbath was to desist from work one day a week, to rest; as God had rested from His work after the creation. Observance of the Sabbath was made one of the Ten Commandments received by Moses at Mount Sinai. (One can perhaps understand their opposition to work on the Sabbath!)

2. Healing the dumb and blind man: Matthew 12:22 – 23; Luke 11:14

Then, after healing the man with the shrivelled hand, and many others, a man who could neither see nor speak was brought to Jesus. He healed him, so that the dumb man could then both speak and see.

Note: In Year Three (below), we see that Jesus carried out the miracle of feeding the 5,000 in [Bethsaida](#), just east of the Sea of Galilee (refer to page [67](#) below). According to John's gospel (John 6:1 – 15), this miracle *might* have occurred at this time in Year Two rather than in Year Three due to a confusion in the similar looking names of [Bethesda](#) (near Jerusalem) and [Bethsaida](#) (in Galilee). Do these names, dear reader, confuse you too?

Healing on the Sabbath

That Jesus would heal on the Sabbath is well known from the gospels. On the few occasions when **Jesus** takes the initiative in a healing, it is **generally on the Sabbath** (see also Mark 3:1 – 6; Luke 13:10 – 17; 14:1 – 6).

A person's Sabbath conduct was the Jewish religious leaders' litmus test of conformity. Their tests followed their burdensome Sabbath rules.

The Pharisees were well known for their *own* careless approach to the Sabbath, often feasting and drinking excessively, but at the same time, they nitpicked how others kept it. They had no reservations about throwing a party on God's day of rest, but to heal the sick on the Sabbath was, to them, unforgivable (Mark 3:1 – 6). Jesus accepted invitations to feasts (Luke 15:1 – 2), and was known to enjoy eating and drinking with publicans and sinners. He knew the Jewish leaders would use occasions

like these to condemn Him.

Several times, Jesus healed on the *Sabbath* day. However, the Pharisees saw his healing as a violation of **their** strict rule of no work on the Sabbath. Of course, the “no work” rule on the Sabbath was originally God’s idea. He gave the Jews the Ten Commandments, the fifth of which was, “*Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work*” (Exodus 20:8 – 10).

For more on this topic, visit websites under “Healing on the Sabbath Day”.

6 On a hillside *near Capernaum*

Gospel references: [See below for each happening]

1. **Selecting the 12 apostles/disciples** Matthew 10:1 – 4; Mark 3:13 – 19; Luke 6:12 – 16

Sometime after Jesus healed the man with the shrivelled hand, and withdrew to continue his ministry in the Galilee area, he went up on to the hillside, probably near Capernaum, and summoned 12 men whom he wanted as his disciples whom he could send out to preach, with power to drive out evil spirits.

The 12 he appointed (in the order used by Matthew) are: **Peter** (which was the new name he gave Simon), **Andrew** (the brother of Peter), **James** the son of Zebedee and **John** his brother, **Philip**, Bartholomew (alternative name **Nathanael**), **Thomas**, **Matthew** (or Levi), **James** the son of Alphaeus, **Thaddaeus** (or Judas, son of James), **Simon** the Patriot, and **Judas Iscariot**, who betrayed him.

Note: This calling of disciples seems to be repetition of Year 1 #4. Could there have been *two* callings?

Year 1: Six are called – Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip and Nathanael (the six highlighted above in red) (look back at #4 on page 50) and also mentioned just above).

Year 2: Six *more* are called – Thomas, Matthew (or Levi), James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus (or Judas, son of James), Simon the Patriot, and Judas Iscariot (i.e. the six highlighted above in blue).

[So perhaps the heading above should be rephrased as “**Selecting six more apostles/disciples**”.]

2 **Sermon on the Mount**

Matthew 5 (continues in chapters 6 & 7); Luke 6:20 – 49;
John 19

Note: While certain teachings from the Sermon on the Mount can be found in all four Gospels, you can only read them in their *entirety* in Matthew.

The renowned Sermon on the Mount is from Matthew's Gospel. As is to be expected with Matthew, it is closely tied in with Old Testament teachings. Many phrases which we associate very strongly with the Sermon and with Jesus' teachings have close parallels in the Old Testament.

Example: **Matthew** 5:5 “*Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth*’. Compare this with: **Psalms** 37:11 “*But the meek shall inherit the earth . . .*”.

Some of the passages are also found in Luke's shorter "**Sermon on the Plain**". Further, Matthew has Jesus



One artist's depiction of the Sermon on the Mount (with perhaps, a more realistic-looking Jesus)

addressing a **Jewish** audience who would be familiar with Jewish law as is made clear in Matthew 5:17 – 20. Luke, on the other hand, is addressing a **Gentile** audience who would not be as familiar with Jewish law.

[From Matthew] When Jesus (as he continued teaching and healing in Galilee) saw the vast crowds he went up the hill-side (attempting, unsuccessfully, to avoid the crowd!) and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. Matthew puts Jesus on a mountain because that is where Moses was (Mt. Sinai) and Jesus is the new Moses.

The Sermon on the **Mount** has *nine* **beatitudes**, the verses that begin with *Blessed are the...* (Matthew 5:3 – 11), while the Sermon on the **Plain** has just *four* beatitudes with the word *blessed* (Luke 6:20 – 22).

Note: The meaning of **beatitude** is a state of supreme happiness or blessedness. So, any of the declarations of blessedness made by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is a beatitude.

For more on the beatitudes, refer to the website “Beatitudes”.

Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17 – 49)

In *Luke's* report, Jesus comes *down* from a hillside to give the Sermon on *level ground* and his message is grounded in real-life issues. Luke's account is shorter than Matthew's, but like Matthew, he also uses the word “*blessed*”. For example, verse 20: “*Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.*”

Luke recorded the Sermon on the Plain for a **Gentile** audience who would be less familiar with Jewish law and perhaps needed a more *practical* approach to the Christian life, as contained in the basic beatitudes (verses 20 – 23) and threatening “woes” (verses 24 – 26) of Luke's Sermon on the Plain.

Notes related to the two sermons

The social apostle

Luke has been called the **social apostle** because of his **sympathy with the poor and his emphasis on kindness**. The Sermon on the Plain contains several revolutionary Christian principles – often quoted throughout the ages – dealing with interpersonal relations, such as: “*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you*” (Luke 6:27), and “*Do to others as you would have them do to you*” (Luke 6:31)

God and money

Matthew 6:24 (NIV) “*No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.*” Once Christianity became widespread and popular enough to attract the rich and powerful, much effort had to be expended to explain away this verse. However, it makes more sense to accept the verse as meaning just what it seems to mean – an expression of a savage feeling against the rich on the part of the poor who made up the early Christian congregations.

Did the Sermon on the Mount actually happen?

Perhaps what we call the “Sermon on the Mount” is the core of what Jesus said many times and in different locations throughout his ministry. In fact, Mark and Luke have sections of what Matthew includes in the Sermon scattered throughout their narratives. From this evidence, some scholars believe that the Sermon on the Mount never actually happened as reported in Matthew's gospel, but that Matthew

simply gathered snippets of Jesus' various teachings into a neat, easily digested package (and, perhaps, the desire to use more links to the Old Testament).

Refer also to the websites on “Sermon on the Mount” and “Sermon on the Mount – was it the same as the Sermon on the Plain?”

7 Capernaum again – healing the Roman centurion’s servant

Gospel references: Matthew 8:5 – 13; Luke 7:1 – 10

[Mentioned in just these two gospels]

As Jesus was coming back to Capernaum following the Sermon on the Mount, a Roman centurion approached him and said his servant was in bed at home paralysed and in dreadful pain. Jesus said he would come and heal him but the centurion just asked Jesus to give the order and the servant would recover. Jesus was astonished on hearing this and told the centurion to go home and he would find his servant healed. And his servant *was* healed at that actual moment.

8 At Nain, Jesus brings a widow's son back to life

Gospel reference: Luke 7:11 – 17

[Mentioned only in this gospel]

Not long after healing the centurion's servant, Jesus went into a town called Nain just south of Nazareth, accompanied by his disciples and a large crowd (again!!). As they approached the town gate, it happened that some people were carrying out a dead man, the only son of his widowed mother. The usual crowd of fellow-townsmen was with her. When Jesus saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "*Don't cry.*" Then he walked up and put his hand on the bier while the bearers stood still. Then he said, "*Young man, wake up!*" The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus handed him to his mother.

This story is only told in the gospel of Luke. In Luke’s account, [this was the first time a person had been raised from the dead](#). The story again shows the **social apostle** side of Luke by describing how Jesus was moved to compassion and his sympathy with the poor and his compassion for people.

9 Preaching in the Galilee area – the parable of the sower

Gospel references: Matthew 13:1 – 35; Mark 4:1 – 9,13-20; Luke 8:1 – 15

[Mentioned in just these three gospels]

Jesus continues his preaching tour of the Galilee area accompanied by his 12 apostles and some **women** helpers who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases, among them Mary (called Magdalene). While a large crowd was gathering (another one!!), he told the parable of the sower.

Note: Luke just says the preaching was in “Galilee” while Matthew and Mark say “by the lake-side” (of the Sea of Galilee).

After Jesus had told this parable, the disciples approached him and asked, "*Why do you talk to them in parables?*" Jesus then explains why he speaks in parables (Matthew 13:10 – 17, Mark 4:10 – 12, Luke 8:9 – 10). For more on Jesus’ parables, refer to pages [84ff](#).



Image for the Parable of the Sower

10 Calming the storm and healing another madman

Gospel references: [See below for each happening]

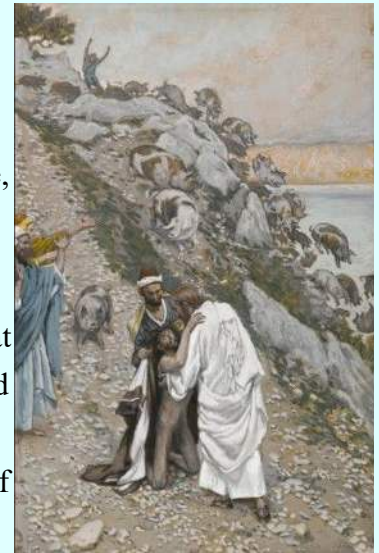
1. Calming the storm Matthew 8:23 – 27; Mark 4:35 – 41; Luke 8:22 – 25

After preaching and healing many people in the Galilee area, Jesus and his disciples now intend to cross over to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee (with, according to Mark, other *small* craft). But while crossing, a terrific storm sprang up which threatened to sink their boat. Jesus “rebukes” the wind and the waves and the storm subsides.

2. The madman and the pigs Matthew 8:28 – 34; Mark 5:1 – 20; Luke 8:26 – 39

The different gospels do not state precisely the location of the healing of the madman but it is either on the actual shoreside of the Sea of Galilee or, more probably, further away somewhere in the Decapolis region (Decapolis means ‘ten cities’ and is the region indicated by #10 on the map). Whatever the case, it must have been a predominantly *Gentile* region to account for the large numbers of [pigs](#) or [swine](#) mentioned. These were forbidden to Jews as food.

In the story, Jesus is met by two devil-possessed men who want to know what he has to do with them. It happened that in the distance there was a large herd of pigs feeding. So the devils implored Jesus to throw them (the devils) out and send them into the herd of pigs, which Jesus agrees to. The whole herd of pigs rushed madly down a steep cliff into the lake and were drowned.



Jesus the pig killer?

Refer also to the websites on “Jesus the pig killer?” and “Jesus – why did he allow the demons to enter the herd of pigs?”

11 Back to Capernaum – more miracles

Gospel references: [See below for each happening]

Sailing back across the Sea of Galilee (Mark 5:21) Jesus returns to his own “home town” of Capernaum. At least four more miracles are recorded in the gospels as taking place there. These are (1) the healing of a paralysed man, (2) raising Jairus' daughter from the dead, (3) the bleeding woman, and (4) the healing of two blind men and the dumb man. The accounts in the three gospels are similar for the first three miracles. The fourth is only recorded by Matthew. We look briefly at each of these.

1. Healing a paralysed man Matthew 9:1 – 8; Mark 2:1 – 12; Luke 5:17 – 26

After healing the madman – or men – (#10 above) Jesus re-embarked on the boat, crossed the lake, and came to Capernaum. Immediately, some people arrived bringing a paralytic lying flat on his bed. When Jesus saw the faith of those who brought him he *first* told the paralytic that “*his sins are forgiven.*” Some Scribes and Pharisees sitting there were saying that Jesus was talking blasphemy and that only God can forgive sins. Jesus’ response was to tell the paralysed man to get up, pick up his bed and go home, which he was able to do.

2. Raising Jairus’ daughter from the dead Matthew 9:18 – 26; Mark 5:21 – 43; Luke 8:40 – 56

Then came a man called Jairus, one of the [synagogue presidents](#). When he saw Jesus, he knelt before him, pleading desperately for his help saying that his daughter was dying and that if Jesus would just come and put his hands on her then she would get better and live. Jesus came to the house, he said that the little girl

was not dead but fast asleep. He took her hand and she got up and healed.

Notes:

1. Jesus again gave orders for them not to tell anyone (but news of this still spread through all that region).
2. It is interesting that the Jairus was one of people from the synagogue, who like the Pharisees, etc. might be antagonistic towards Jesus



Jairus' daughter raised from the dead

3. The bleeding woman Matthew 9:20 – 22; Mark 5:21 – 35; Luke 8:40 – 48

This healing took place on the same occasion as the healing of Jairus' daughter. Among the crowd was a woman, who had a haemorrhage for 12 years and who had derived no benefit from anybody's treatment. She came up behind Jesus and touched the edge of his cloak, with the result that her haemorrhage stopped at once. Jesus asked who had touched him; he knew this as he felt power going out from him. The woman fell at his feet and admitted before everybody why she had to touch him, and how she had been instantaneously cured. Jesus told her that it was her faith that had healed her.



A woman with a haemorrhage touches Jesus' cloak

4. Two blind men and the dumb man Matthew 9:27 – 34

After bringing the daughter of Jairus back to life, two blind men asked Jesus to have pity on them. Jesus first asked the blind men if they believed he could heal them. When they replied "Yes", Jesus touched their eyes, and they were healed. (Again Jesus tells the people not to tell anyone about this, but the news soon spreads over the whole region.)

Later, a dumb man possessed by a devil/demon was brought to Jesus. As soon as the devil had been ejected the dumb man began to talk. The Pharisees who witnessed this were none too pleased, commenting that Jesus threw out the demons because he was in league with the Prince of demons (the devil) himself.

This now ends our account of the travelling and happenings associated in the second year of the ministry of Jesus. We now turn to the third and final year of Jesus' ministry.

The Third and Final year of Jesus' Ministry: AD 29-30

What happened and where?

The map on the next page shows the travels and happenings in Year Three. It resembles an expanded version of Year One. There is the Galilee region but this has expanded to include the towns of Tyre and Sidon further north in Phoenicia. As this is the last year of Jesus' life there are, perhaps as might be expected, more happenings in Jerusalem and the surrounding region. In addition, there is one happening each in Samaria and Perea.

The 25 numbers on the map show the *possible* sequence of the places Jesus stayed in and visited in this third and final year of his ministry. They begin in Capernaum and end in Jerusalem.

Galilee and surrounding areas

- 1 Jesus travels from Capernaum to his native town of Nazareth
- 2 In Nazareth, he is **rejected** for a second time
- 3 He continues through Galilee and **sends out the 12 apostles to preach the Gospel**
- 4 The 12 return to Capernaum from their mission throughout Galilee
- 5 From Capernaum, they go off by boat with Jesus to a quiet place near Bethsaida; **feeding of the 5,000**
- 6 The disciples return across the Sea of Galilee; **Jesus walks on the water** to join them. They land near the Plain of Gennesaret and Jesus heals many people there
- 7 From Gennesaret back to Capernaum; Jesus teaches about **the Bread of Life**
- 8 To Tyre and Sidon region; **healing of the daughter of a gentile Phoenician woman**
- 9 From Sidon to Decapolis
- 10 Decapolis: **Healing of the deaf and mute man and feeding the 4,000**
- 11 To Magadan via the Sea of Galilee
- 12 Across the lake again to Bethsaida; **healing a blind man**
- 13 North to Caesarea Philippi; **Peter's confession**
- 14 To Mount Hermon area; **transfiguration of Jesus, healing boy with epilepsy**
- 15 Back to Capernaum; **Jesus pays the temple tax with a fish!**

Then to avoid dangers in Samaria and Judea, Jesus remains in Galilee for a while.

Samaria

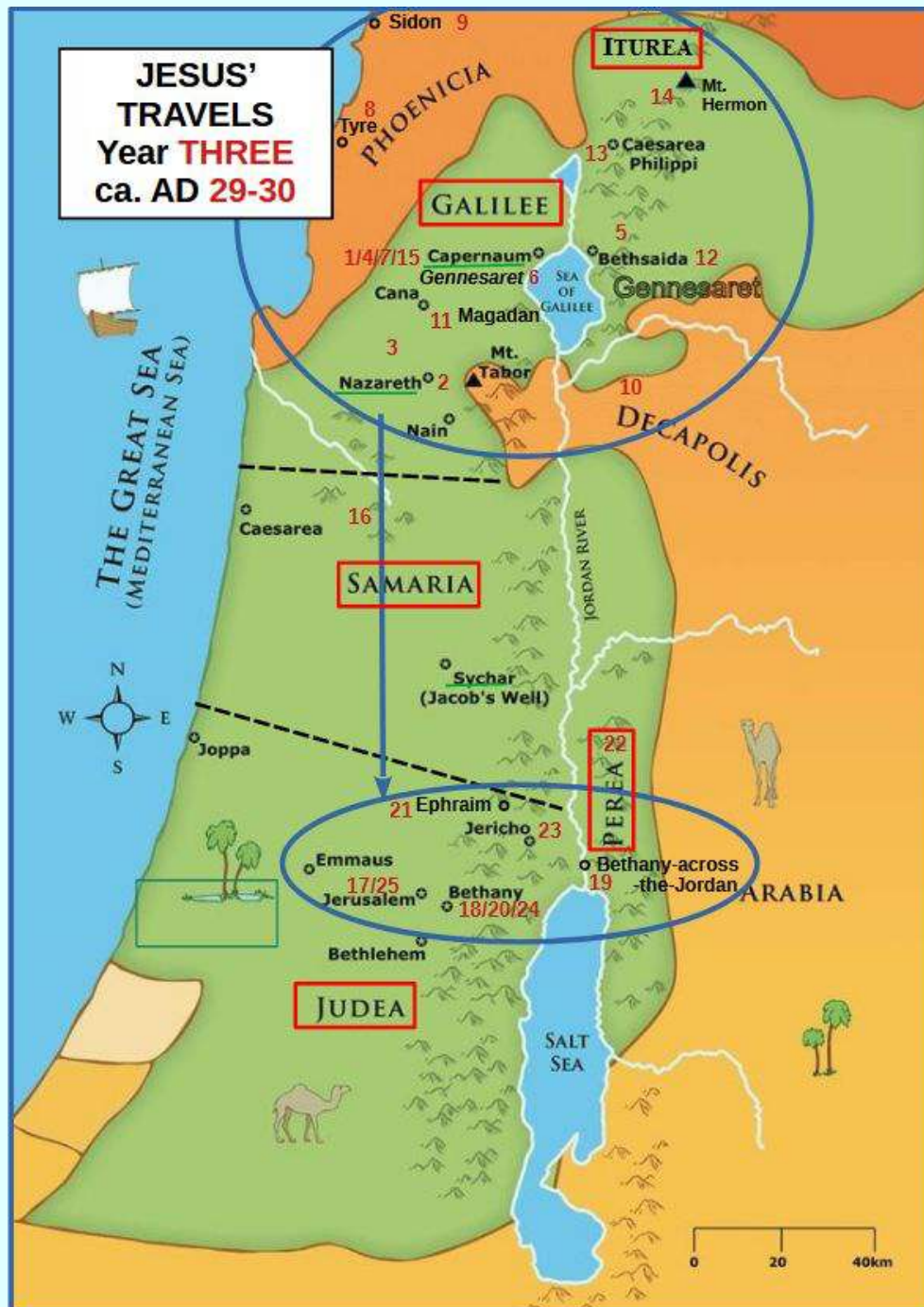
- 16 Jesus leaves Capernaum and Galilee for the last earthly time to go to Jerusalem; in **Samaria, healing of the 10 lepers; rejection in a Samaritan village**

Judea and Perea

- 17 Jerusalem: **Feast of the Tabernacles, his last passover, woman caught in adultery, healing a blind man**
- 18 To Bethany to visit Mary and Martha; return to Jerusalem for **Feast of Dedication**
- 19 To Bethany-across-the-Jordan (or Bethabara) in the province of Perea
- 20 Bethany again; **raises Lazarus from the dead**
- 21 To Ehpraim (north of Jerusalem) because of threats to his life.
- 22 To Perea again; **blesses the little children and speaks to a rich young man**
- 23 He heads back towards Jerusalem via Jericho; **heals one blind man (or two?) and converts Zacchaeus, another tax collector**

24 Jericho to Bethany; **anointed by Mary**

25 Back to Jerusalem for the last time in his life, Jesus makes his **triumphant entry into the city**. Mount of Olives, last supper



Travels and happenings in detail: **Year Three AD 29-30**

1 & 2 From Capernaum to Nazareth – a **second rejection**

Gospel references: Matthew 13:54 – 58; Mark 6:1 – 6

[Mentioned in just these two gospels]

At the end of Year Two, we find Jesus back in Capernaum. So it is from Capernaum that his travels and acts in Year Three commence.

From Capernaum, Jesus travels to his home-town of Nazareth accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him witnessed miracles he

performed and were amazed. However, they again looked down on him as just a mere carpenter's son and took offence and rejected him. Consequently, Jesus knew he and his disciples had to move on. This rejection in Nazareth was the second, the first being at the end of his first year (see page 52 above).

3 & 4 Jesus' ministry continues in other parts of Galilee

Gospel references: Matthew 10:5; Mark 6:6b – 13; Luke 9:1 – 6, 10

[Mentioned in just these three gospels]

3 Jesus sends out the 12 apostles to preach the Gospel. (The gospels do not state this clearly, e.g. Luke 9 does not say to *where* they are sent).

4 The 12 then return to Capernaum from their mission throughout Galilee; Matthew and Mark do not say clearly to *where*.

We will *assume* Capernaum as in their next journey it is stated that they set out from Capernaum!!

5 Near Bethsaida – feeding the 5,000

Gospel references: Matthew 14:13 – 21; Mark 6:14 – 44; Luke 9:7 – 17; John 6:1 – 15

[Mentioned in all four gospels]

It is possible that at this point, Jesus learnt about the *execution* of John the Baptist at the hands of Herod Antipas. For more details about this, look back at the life and death of John the Baptist on pages 35 – 37. Also refer to Matthew 14:1 – 12, Mark 6:14 – 29 and Luke 9:7 – 10.

Anyway, Jesus and his disciples retire to a quiet place *near* Bethsaida on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. (Note: *Near* Bethsaida, not the town itself; some sources say it was actually Caesarea Philippi north of Bethsaida.) This place would have been a refreshing change of scenery and a welcome retreat in that moment of loss and confusion.

Many others followed Jesus across. When Jesus emerged from his quiet retreat, he saw a vast crowd (again!!) and was deeply moved and cured the sick among them. As evening fell, his disciples told him to send away the crowds so that they can go into the villages and buy themselves food. But Jesus told them that was not necessary and he then performs a miracle with "*five loaves and two fish*" supplied by a boy and provided enough to feed the crowd (about 5,000 men, apart from the women and children).

Notes:

1 Feeding the 5,000 is the only miracle of nature or healing recorded in similar terms in *all four Gospels*.

2 John's account is slightly different in that the miracle might *not* have occurred at this time in Year Three but in Year *Two* after Jesus returned to Galilee following his visit to Jerusalem where he healed the crippled man at the Pool of Bethesda (*not* Bethsaida). See pages 58-59 earlier for the visit to Jerusalem and healing a crippled man (#4) then more healing after his return to Galilee (#5). A confusion of similar looking names – *Bethesda* and *Bethsaida* – could account for this.

6 Walking on water

Gospel references: Matthew 14:22 – 34; Mark 6:45 – 56; John 6:16 – 24

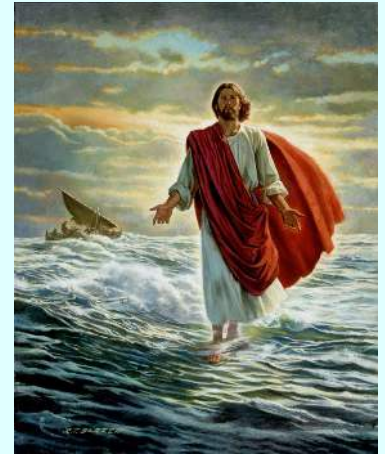
[Not included in Luke's gospel]

Directly after the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus insisted on his disciples' getting aboard their boat and going on ahead of him back to the other side (of the Sea of Galilee), while he himself sent the crowds home.

When it grew late he was there by himself while the boat, with the disciples, was by this time a long way

from the shore and at the mercy of the waves, for the wind was dead against them.

In the small hours, Jesus went out to them, *walking on the water of the lake*. When the disciples caught sight of him walking on the water they were terrified. "It's a ghost!" they said, and screamed with fear. But at once Jesus spoke to them. "It's all right! It's I myself, don't be afraid!" Peter then decided to meet Jesus on the water, but naturally began to sink until Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. When they were both aboard the boat, the wind dropped and the crew (not the disciples!) knelt down before Jesus, crying, "You are indeed the Son of God!" They then landed near the Plain of **Gennesaret** on the western side of the Sea of Galilee (shown as #6 on the map).



Jesus walks on water

When the crowd, who were still in Bethsaida, realised that neither Jesus nor the disciples were there any longer, they themselves got into some boats to cross the lake and look for him.

7 Back in Capernaum – the Bread of Life

Gospel references: John 6:22 – 59; 60 – 70

[Mentioned only in John's gospel]

From Gennesaret, Jesus and his disciples make their way back to Capernaum (John 6:24) *plus* the crowd from Bethsaida whose physical hunger had just been satisfied. Now Jesus teaches them about the "Bread of Life". (This teaching is found only in John's gospel.)

Food is essential to survive *physically*. In the Israel of the time that would include *bread*. In Asia it would include rice or noodles. So if Jesus were preaching in Asia, he might have said "I am the *rice* of life; or the *noodles* of life." John also mentions how during the Exodus from Egypt, the people ate **manna** in the desert (John 6:31). So whether bread, rice, noodles or manna, it is the physical appetite that is satisfied.

So when Jesus says, "**I am the Bread of Life**" he just means that we are not satisfied *spiritually* unless we understand what he preaches and teaches, which is what today we read in the gospels. We cannot survive spiritually without understanding and applying these teachings.

The crowds in the gospel reading went in search of Jesus, not because they had understood his miracle, but because he had filled their *physical* appetites, merely as someone who could meet their physical needs. So, Jesus responded with this powerful and profound truth: "I am the bread of life that came down from heaven" (John 6:41).

The teaching seemed so difficult to understand that many of the crowd turned away and no longer followed him (John 6:66).

8 To Tyre and Sidon region: Jesus heals the daughter of a Phoenician woman

Gospel references: Matthew 15:21 – 28; Mark 7:24 – 30

[Mentioned in just these two gospels]

Teaching the *crowds* in Capernaum (or trying to!) must have been exhausting for Jesus so he and his disciples retire from Galilee to the region of Tyre in Phoenicia (modern-day Lebanon) outside of Israel.

There, a non-Jewish/Gentile Phoenician woman approaches Jesus and asks him to heal her sick daughter. This is a somewhat difficult account to understand. First Jesus says the gospel is only for the *Jews* (Matthew 15:24) but this woman is a *Gentile* (that is, non Jewish). Then, Jesus is uncharacteristically *unkind* by using the term "dogs" to refer to Gentiles (Matthew 15: 26, Mark 7:27). Nevertheless, Jesus did not refuse her request, and her daughter was healed.

Reference to dogs and pigs/swine

In the above story of the Phoenician woman, Jesus uses the term "dogs". But this, as well as "pigs/swine" also appears in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew has Jesus instructing His followers: "Do not give *dogs* what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to *pigs*..." (Matthew 7:6). However, the reference to dogs and pigs may be a quotation selected by Matthew to support his own view of a Jewish-oriented Christianity. In other words, he might be saying that one ought not to make a great effort to spread the teachings of Jesus among the Gentiles.

Dogs and pigs/pigs were ritually unclean animals. To apply either term to someone was a matter of high insult – and still is in many cultures! The word "dogs" was a common term used by first-century Jews in reference to Gentiles and this may also have been used by some early *Jewish Christians* to refer to *Gentile Christians* as "dogs" a bias which was amply used by some of the early *Gentile Christians*! However, there is a lot of discussion as to how accurate this is and how the words used in the gospel stories should be interpreted.

At the time that the gospel of Matthew was written, it was quite clear that most Jews were resolutely *rejecting* the Messiah-hood of Jesus and would never accept it, whereas a surprising number of Gentiles were asking admittance. Christianity could not close the door upon the Gentile or it would die. Even Matthew saw that.

For more, refer also to the website "Jesus – use of the term "dogs".

Why did Jesus go to the region of Tyre and Sidon?

The gospels do not say why Jesus went to this region. Perhaps again just to rest and escape for a while the crowds and rejection in Galilee. It would also have allowed Jesus to remain in seclusion from his *enemies* a little longer, and it also gave him much needed time to be alone with his own followers. From Tyre, Jesus and his disciples then travel further north to the area of Sidon.

Commentators are divided as to whether Jesus and His disciples *actually* visited Tyre and Sidon or just stepped out of Galilee into the *region* of Tyre, though the *mention* of Sidon seems to indicate that they went deeper into Phoenician territory than just "stepping outside" of Galilee.

9 & 10 Miracles in the Decapolis

Anyway, Jesus then leaves the Sidon area for Galilee (Matthew 15:29) but via a circuitous route through the Decapolis. There, two miracles occur. First, he heals the deaf and mute man and then feeds the 4,000.

1. Healing the deaf and mute man Mark 7:31 – 37 [Only mentioned in this gospel]

When passing through the Decapolis, a man who was deaf and unable to speak intelligibly was brought to Jesus. The man was healed. Jesus then gave instructions that they should tell no one about this happening (again!!!), but the more he told them, the more they broadcast the news; they were amazed that Jesus was able to make the deaf hear and the dumb speak.

2. Feeding the 4,000 Matthew 15:29 – 39; Mark 8:1 – 10 [Only mentioned in these two gospels]

After healing the deaf and dumb man, it happened again that a large crowd collected and had nothing to eat. This time, when Jesus asked how many loaves they had, the reply was “Seven”. They had a few small fish as well. Jesus then performed another miracle and there was enough for everybody to eat until they were satisfied. (Matthew 15:38 says”*four thousand men, besides women and children.*”)

Note: Mark doesn't actually state that there were 4,000 “people”, this latter word being added by the RSV (Revised Standard Version of the Bible) to make more sense of the text – but it's entirely superfluous and should, rather, have been omitted to allow Mark's statement to say simply that there were 4,000 who had been fed without suggesting that the number included both sexes and all minors.

For more, refer to website “Jesus – feeding the 4,000”.

11 By boat to the Magadan region – and frustration!

Gospel references: Matthew 15:32 – 39, 16:1 – 12; Mark 8:11 – 13, 14 – 21

[Mentioned in just these two gospels]

Note: On the map, I show the name of the place as Magadan. But different names are mentioned in the gospels: *Magadan* (Matthew 15:39 **NIV**); *Magdala* (Matthew 15:39 **KJV**); *Dalmanutha* (Mark 8:10 **NIV and KJV**). Some scholars believe Dalmanutha is either near Magadan or is another name for Magadan. Also, Magadan and Magdala may be the same place but one is in Hebrew and the other in Aramaic.

Whatever, we don't really know why Jesus interrupts his journey through the quiet Gentile lands of Phoenicia and Decapolis with a stop in Magadan where the Pharisees are waiting to harass him once again. Jesus equates the insidious false teachings of the Pharisees with **yeast** (Mark 8:14 – 21).

Mark 8:11: The Pharisees again came to *argue* with Jesus. They were not coming to learn or to be healed. They came to test him. They argued with him and challenged him to give them a sign. Earlier Jesus would not perform miracles when confronted with hard-hearted unbelief in Nazareth and elsewhere.

Mark 8:12 – 13: Jesus' emotions are evident as Mark states that he sighed deeply. The repeated unbelief and antagonistic challenges frustrated and discouraged Jesus. On this occasion he refused to give any kind of a sign to those whose hearts were already firmly set against him. Jesus' intensity of feeling comes out in his use of the words “*truly I tell you*” and his refusal to give a sign. Jesus' miracles had already been a sign of the presence of the kingdom of God. Those signs demanded a response of *faith*. Jesus refused to submit to the testing of the hard-hearted unbelief of the Pharisees. He put his refusal into action by leaving them.

Mark 8:14-21: **Yeast** grows and spreads throughout dough as bread is made. Later in this chapter, Jesus would boldly predict his suffering and death. Here he warned the disciples of the danger of the unbelief of the Pharisees and the rulers established by Rome such as Herod the Great (long dead by this time). The disciples completely misunderstood Jesus' warning about yeast. They thought he was talking about literal

bread. In so many ways they still did not recognise the spiritual battle that was raging around them. Their inability to see that spiritual battle was why it was so important for Jesus to warn them. In some ways his disciples did not seem much further along in their understanding than the Pharisees.

12 To Bethsaida again – healing the blind man

Gospel reference: Mark 8:22 – 26

[Mentioned only in Mark]

After the frustration experienced in Magadan where Jesus refused to give the Pharisees a sign from heaven, he and his disciples went across the lake (again!) and arrived at Bethsaida where a blind man was brought to him, with the earnest request that Jesus should touch him. Jesus took the blind man's hand and led him outside the village. Then he moistened his eyes with saliva and putting his hands on him, asked, "Do you see anything?" The man looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." Then Jesus put his hands on his eyes once more and his sight came into focus. And he recovered and saw everything sharp and clear. And Jesus sent him off to his own house with the words, "Don't even go into the village." (Some manuscripts say "Don't go and tell anyone in the village".

Notes on Bethsaida

- 1 Remember that earlier the feeding of the 5,000 took place in the *countryside near* Bethsaida, not in the town itself.
- 2 Bethsaida was also the birthplace of three of Jesus' disciples: Philip, Peter, and Andrew (John 1:44 – 45; 12:21).
- 3 Most scholars believe that Bethsaida was renamed Julias (in honour of the daughter of the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus) by Philip the tetrarch, grandson of Herod the Great, at some point during Jesus' public ministry. However, all mention of Bethsaida disappeared by the 2nd century, and only buried ruins now remain.

13 To Caesarea Philippi – Peter's confession and the keys of the kingdom

Gospel references: Matthew 16:13 – 20/23; Mark 8:27 – 30/33; Luke 9:18 – 21

[Not mentioned in John's gospel]

Jesus and his disciples now travel north again, this time from Bethsaida to Caesarea Philippi not far from Mount Hermon (refer to the map). What happens there is a very significant event. First, Jesus asked his disciples, "Whom do men say that I am?" They responded that some say he is John the Baptist. Some say he is Elias, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. Then, Jesus asked, "But who do **you** say that I am?" This is where Peter **confesses** that Jesus is "**the Messiah, the Son of the living God**". Jesus then promises Peter "**the keys of the kingdom of heaven.**" (Matthew 16:16, 19). *Note:* Matthew 16:19 is the *only* time that the Bible mentions **keys to the kingdom**.



Mount Hermon: snow covers all three of its peaks for most of the year

For more on this, refer to website "Keys of the kingdom".

A **key** is a badge of knowledge (Luke 11:52), and then as now is used to open doors. Peter used the “keys” – knowledge – that Christ gave him (a) to *open* the door to the *Jews* on the Day of **Pentecost** (**Acts 2**), (b) to the *Samaritans* after the preaching of Philip (**Acts 8:14 – 17**), and (c) to the *Gentiles* after the Lord had sent him a vision and an appeal from Cornelius (**Acts 10**). (See the note below on the “Day of Pentecost”.)

Peter’s confession is the turning point of the gospel. Jesus could appoint Peter "second in command," Matthew 16:18 says “... *upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*” Jesus was making a **pun** here. Since "Peter" means "rock," he was saying: "You are Rock and on this rock . . ." It was perhaps the most influential pun in all history. Peter, according to tradition, went to Rome in later life and became the first Bishop of Rome. It was believed that succeeding Bishops of Rome inherited this role as the “rock” upon which the Church was built and each continued to hold the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

Caesarea Philippi

Caesarea Philippi was the site of an ancient town in northern Israel. It was founded by Philip the Tetrarch, son of Herod the Great and was located on the southern slope of Mount Hermon. He named it Caesarea Philippi to honour Caesar (and perhaps “Philippi” to honour himself!).

The town of Caesarea Philippi *no longer exists* but today, the location is known as Banyas or Banias.

Refer also to the websites on “Caesarea Philippi”.



The spring of Banias, at the site of the former Caesarea Philippi

Day of Pentecost (Acts 2)

On the day of Pentecost, Peter, in the presence of the other 11 disciples, speaks a message to the Jews from all over the known world, metaphorically using the keys to open the kingdom, inviting hearers in and building the church. Up until this point it was only **Jesus** who spoke/preached to the disciples. Here we see **Peter** act on the commission given to him by Christ in Matthew 16.

For more, refer to the website “Day of Pentecost”.

14 Mount Hermon: The Transfiguration and more healing

1. The Transfiguration Matthew 17:1 – 13; Mark 9:2 – 13; Luke 9:28 – 36

A few days later (after Jesus taught his disciples about his death and resurrection for a first time) Jesus chose three disciples – Peter, James and his brother John – to accompany him *high up* on the hill-side (traditionally Mount Hermon and hopefully not as high as the snow!) where they were quite alone. There his whole appearance changed before their eyes, his face shining like the sun and his clothes dazzling white.



An artist’s impression of the Transfiguration of Jesus

Then they saw Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus. This is known as the **transfiguration of Jesus**. (A transfiguration is a major change in appearance.)

Note: Other traditions place the *Transfiguration* to the south, on Mount Tabor which would place it well in the Galilee area, very close to Nazareth – see the map above.

2. Healing the boy with epilepsy Matthew 17:14 – 21; Mark 9:14 – 29; Luke 9:37 – 43a; 17:5 – 6

Following the transfiguration, Jesus and the three disciples came down from the mountain and returned to the crowds. Jesus was asked by a man whose son had epilepsy asking for healing, having previously asked the disciples who were unable to heal the boy. Jesus then heals the boy. Afterwards the disciples asked Jesus why they weren't able to heal the boy, Jesus replied that it was because they had so little faith.

Note: If the Transfiguration of Jesus was on Mount Hermon in the north, this healing may have taken place in the town of Caesarea Philippi. Alternatively, if on the more southerly Mount Tabor, the healing was in the Galilee area. Traditions vary.

15 Back to Capernaum – paying temple tax with a fish!

Gospel reference: Matthew 17:24 – 27

[Only mentioned in Matthew]

After the Transfiguration and the healing of the epileptic boy, Jesus and his disciples arrived at Capernaum (again!!!). There a strange incident occurs at the temple.

All Jews from age 20 upward had to pay a tax on entering a Jewish temple. The tax was two drachma, approximately two days' wages. It was to be used for the temple upkeep and repair. And Matthew, being the gospel writer who likes to link New Testament happenings with those in the Old Testament, cites several specific occasions recorded in the Old Testament when this tax was collected.

At the temple, the temple tax-collectors came up and asked *Peter* if Jesus has to pay temple-tax. Matthew suggests that as Jesus in the Son of God, he did *not* have to pay the tax. However, Jesus did so to avoid giving unnecessary offence. But he does this in a strange way. He tells Peter to go to the lake [the Sea of Galilee], catch a fish and in its mouth will be a *four*-drachma coin. Peter was then told to take the coin and give it to the tax collectors as the tax for both himself as well as Jesus (hence the *four* drachmas for two people).



Peter getting a coin to pay the temple tax from the mouth of a fish

Note: This is the only miracle that Jesus performed in order to *avoid* offending people. Jesus typically performed miracles as well as made statements that his audiences deemed offensive, particularly the Jewish priesthood.

16 Leaving Capernaum for the last time – healing the ten lepers

Gospel reference: Luke 17:11 – 19

[Only mentioned in Luke]

Jesus travelled down to Jerusalem to celebrate important Jewish festivals. This time, in the third year of his ministry (but for Luke and the other synoptic gospels, the only time – see page 42 again “One year or

three”), he would *not* return to Galilee. Note the one-way way arrow in the map above, which indicates this.

Travelling into Samaria, 10 lepers meet Jesus and asked him to take pity on them. Jesus just told them to go and show themselves to the priests. On their way, nine of them were cured. The other one came back but instead of complaining as to why he wasn’t healed, he praised God. This was perhaps unexpected as the man was a Samaritan and Jews and Samaritans did not associate with each other due to differences in religion. Jews also regarded them as foreigners, as Jesus did in this episode (Luke 17:17)! Anyway, Jesus then healed the man (verse 19).

17 Jerusalem – Feast of the Tabernacles, his last passover and the healing of a blind man

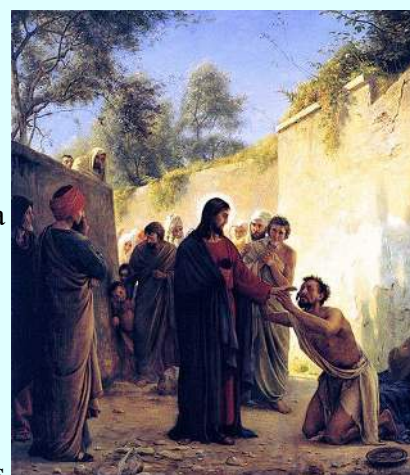
Gospel reference: John 7:1 – 13; 9:1 – 41

[Only mentioned in John]

Passing through Samaria (along the dangerous roads, remember), Jesus and his disciples reach Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of the Tabernacles. This feast is a time of spiritual purification for Jewish people to reconcile with God. This would be in the autumn of AD 29 (September to October on our calendar). As he walked along, Jesus saw a man who had been blind from birth. He cured the man’s blindness. To do this, it is recorded that he took some clay and smeared it on the man’s eyes then told the man to go to a pool to wash it off and on doing so his sight was restored.

This miracle occurred on the Sabbath day which annoyed some Pharisees (again!!) who said that Jesus could not be from God since he does not observe the Sabbath (according to *their* laws, which included abstinence from work).

Note: Each year of his ministry, Jesus visited Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. This third year of his ministry was to be his last passover. Refer to the website “The last passover of Jesus”.



Healing of the Blind Man by Jesus (by a 19th century Danish artist)

The Feast of Tabernacles

The **Feast of Tabernacles** (or Feast of Booths) is a week-long fall festival commemorating the 40-year journey of the Israelites in the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt. Along with the **Passover** and the **Festival of Weeks**, it is one of three great pilgrimage feasts recorded in the Bible when all Jewish males were required to appear before the Lord **in the Temple in Jerusalem**. So that included Jesus.

The Feast of Tabernacles is also called “Sukkot” which is the Hebrew word for “booths” or “tents”. The Jewish people constructed makeshift tents, just as the Israelites did while roaming in the desert. For Christians, the term **Pentecost** is used rather than The Festival of Weeks, though Pentecost signifies the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Christian Church.

Read more from the websites under “Pentecost and the Jewish Feast of Weeks – differences”.

18 To nearby Bethany and back to Jerusalem

1. Visit to the home of Martha

Gospel reference: Luke 10:38 – 42 [Mentioned only in Luke]

During his time in Jerusalem, Jesus visited the village of Bethany (less than two miles, or 3.2 km, outside Jerusalem on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives) where a woman called Martha welcomed him to her house. She had a sister by the name of Mary (and a brother Lazarus, who was raised from the dead – see #20 below). Mary listened to what Jesus was saying but Martha, who was busy with her *elaborate* preparations, was a bit annoyed that Mary had left her to do all the work (perhaps understandably!). But Jesus replied, very nicely, that maybe only a *few* things need to be prepared, and that Mary had chosen the better part.

2. "Hanukkah", or the Feast of Dedication

Gospel reference: John 10:22 [Mentioned only in John]

From Bethany, Jesus returned to Jerusalem for "Hanukkah", the Feast of Dedication which may be celebrated at any time from late November to late December (in our calendar). Hanukkah is a Hebrew word meaning “dedication”. It is an eight-day festival commemorating the victory in 165 BC of the Maccabees over the Seleucid (Eastern Greek) Empire and the rededication of the Second Temple at Jerusalem. It is also called Feast of Dedication, Feast of Lights and Festival of Lights.

Refer to the website “Hanukkah – the story of”.

The Hanukkah that Jesus celebrated would have been in late AD 29 (our calendar). So we are now into the last few months of Jesus’ life which ended in AD 30. These last few months are spent in and around Jerusalem.

19 Jesus withdraws to Bethany-across-the-Jordan

Gospel reference: John 10:40 – 41

[Mentioned only in John]

Jesus withdraws to Bethany-across-the-Jordan (or Bethabara) in the province of Perea (modern Jordan), to the place where John the Baptist had been baptising in the early days. There he stayed for a while and – again – many people came to him. They accepted that all John the Baptist had said about Jesus was true and believed in him.

20 Back in Bethany – The death and raising of Lazarus

Gospel reference: John 11:1 – 41

[Mentioned only in John]

Note: Don’t confuse this Bethany with Bethany-across-the-Jordan. They are two different places.

While Jesus was still across the River Jordan in Perea, he received a message that Lazarus the brother of Martha was very ill back in Bethany. But instead of rushing to Bethany, he stayed where he was two more days! By then Lazarus had died and when Jesus arrived in Bethany, he found that Lazarus had already been in the grave four days. But Jesus told the very upset Martha that her brother would rise again. Jesus was deeply moved by Martha and Mary and others so he raised Lazarus from the dead.

21 The plot to kill Jesus – retreat to Ephraim

Gospel references: Matthew 26:3 – 5; Mark 14:1 – 2; Luke 22:1 – 2; John 11:45 – 57

[Mentioned in all four gospels]

After raising Lazarus from the dead, many of the Jews who had accompanied Mary (the sister of Lazarus) and observed what Jesus did, believed in him. But others went off to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. **The Pharisees were worried that soon *everybody* would be believing in Jesus and that would result in the Romans coming in which would be the end of the Jewish nation.** The Pharisees then issued an order that anyone who knew where Jesus was should tell them, so that they could arrest him.

From that day then, the Pharisees planned to kill Jesus. Because of threats to his life, Jesus and his disciples withdrew from Bethany to a town called **Ephraim** which is about 13 miles (21 km) to the north-east of Jerusalem where he was relatively safe.

22 To Perea again – The rich young man

Gospel references: Matthew 19:1 – 30; 20:17 – 19; Mark 10:13 – 34; Luke 18:15 – 34

[Mentioned only in these three gospels]

Still afraid to return to Jerusalem, Jesus leaves Ephraim and crosses the River Jordan and works in Perea again. After welcoming some little children there, it happened that a man (or a rich young ruler in other accounts) came up to him and asked what good thing he must do to secure eternal life. Jesus replied that he must keep the commandments, which the man said he did. Then Jesus told him if he wanted to be perfect, he should sell his property and give the money away to the poor; this would give him riches in Heaven. When the young man heard that he turned away crestfallen, for he was very wealthy. Jesus then remarked to his disciples that a rich man will find it very difficult to enter the kingdom of Heaven.

Before leaving Perea, Jesus tells his 12 disciples that he was to be handed over to the Jewish religious authorities and condemned to death but that after three days he would rise again. But the disciples did not seem to understand; his words were quite obscure to them and they had no idea of what he meant.

23 Heading to Jerusalem for the last time – passing through Jericho

On his last journey into Jerusalem, Jesus passes from Perea through Jericho where he heals one (or two?) blind men and converts Zacchaeus the tax collector.

1. Healing the blind man (or men)

Gospel references: Matthew 20:29 – 34; Mark 10:46 – 52; Luke 18:35 – 43

[Mentioned only in these three gospels]

While making his way through Jericho, Jesus was again surrounded by a large crowd. There, two (one?) blind men who were sitting by the roadside cried out for Jesus to have pity on them. The crowd tried to hush them up, but this only made them cry out more loudly for Jesus to have pity on them. Jesus, deeply moved with pity, touched their eyes and at once their sight was restored, and they followed him along the road.

2. Jesus and the tax collector (another one!)

Gospel reference: Luke 19:1 – 10 [Mentioned only in Luke]

Next, there was a wealthy man called Zacchaeus, a collector of taxes, who wanted to see what sort of

person Jesus was. Because he was a very short man and because of the crowd, he climbed up into a sycamore tree to get a view of Jesus who was heading that way. Jesus tells him to come down, so Zacchaeus hurriedly climbed down and gladly welcomed him. But the bystanders muttered their disapproval, as tax collectors were hated (see earlier, page 24).

But Zacchaeus said to Jesus he would give half his property to the poor and if he had swindled anybody out of anything (probably true!) he would pay them back four times as much. Jesus said to him that salvation has come to his house that day! And that Zacchaeus is a descendant of Abraham (that is, a Jew), and it was the Jews he had come to seek and to save.

Compare this story of the rich Zacchaeus with that of the rich young man (#22 on the previous page).

The photo (right) shows the Zacchaeus tree in the centre of modern Jericho. It is 18 metres high and is believed to be 2,000 years old and to be the tree that Zacchaeus climbed. In fact, it is probably only about 600 years old, or maybe less.

Look at the video in website on “Jericho sycamore tree YouTube video (one of many)”.



24 Bethany for the last time – Jesus anointed

Gospel references: Matthew 26:6 – 13; Mark 14:3 – 9; John 12:1 – 8

[Mentioned only in these three gospels]

From Jericho, Jesus and his disciples pass down to **Bethany**, just outside Jerusalem. Martha (sister of Mary and Lazarus) waited on the party while Lazarus, her brother (who had earlier been raised from the dead), took his place at a table with Jesus. Then Mary took a whole pound of very expensive perfume and anointed Jesus' feet then wiped them with her hair. The entire house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot (the man who was going to betray Jesus) criticised this, saying that the perfume should be sold and the money given to the poor. He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was dishonest, and as he was in charge of the disciples' purse, he could help himself to the contents. Jesus, knowing he had only a few days to live, replied saying they would always have the poor with them, but they would not always have him!

Note: In these accounts, the anointing takes place *before* Jesus makes his final triumphal entry into Jerusalem. However, other accounts suggest that the anointing took place *after* the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and just two days before the crucifixion (see Matthew 21:1; Mark 11:1; Luke 19:29; John 12:12).

How many times was Jesus anointed?

- Luke 7:36 – 50 (not referred to above) – Chronologically the first anointing of Jesus. This account is different from the very similar passages in Matthew and Mark.
- John 12:1 – 8 – A second anointing just before the triumphal entry into Jerusalem.
- Matthew 26:6 – 13; Mark 14:3 – 9 – A third anointing just before the crucifixion.

Refer also to the websites under “Jesus – anointing of”.

25 The final triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem – riding on a donkey

Gospel references: Matthew 21:1 – 13; Mark 11:1 – 11; Luke 19:28 – 44; John 12:12 – 19

[Mentioned in all four gospels]

As they were approaching Jerusalem, near the hill called the **Mount of Olives**, Jesus sent off two of his disciples, telling them that in the village just ahead they would find a donkey/ass tied up on which no-one had ever yet ridden. They were to untie it and bring it to Him. And if anybody asks them, “*Why are you untying it?*” just say, “*the Lord needs it.*” They brought it to Jesus and as he rode along, people spread out their coats on the roadway. As he approached Jerusalem, where the road slopes down from the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd – except that is, for the Pharisees in the crowd, many of whom had also come from Bethany – shouted praises to God for all the marvellous things that they had seen him do.



Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem

Note that with the establishment of the kingdom in mind, Jesus planned to enter Jerusalem mounted in the traditional fashion of a **king**, and **not on foot**. We could imagine that the Pharisees of Jerusalem must have been outraged – and enraged – at this sight of a Galilean nobody coming into town and claiming to be the Messiah.

Note: Entering Jerusalem in this manner is also prophesied in the Old Testament. In Zechariah 9:9 we read “*See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*” And Matthew – of course! – specifically refers to this in his verse 5 “*... See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*”

The Mount of Olives

The Mount of Olives is a hill about 800 metres high, less than half a mile (0.8 km) east of Jerusalem. Jesus did not select that route by accident. It was from the Mount of Olives, according to prophecy, that the Messiah would appear. Thus, Zechariah, in predicting the divine coming on the day of the Lord says: Zechariah 14:4. “*And his feet shall stand in that day upon the **Mount of Olives**, which is before Jerusalem on the east . . .*”

More cynical scholars see Jesus as *deliberately* setting out to fulfil this prophecy of Zechariah to get a reaction as it is about the arrival of the *king of kings*.



The old city of Jerusalem seen from the Mount of Olives

Clearing the temple of money changers and merchants

Matthew 21:12 – 13 “*Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. ‘It is written, he said to them, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’*” [from Jeremiah].”

Jeremiah 7:11. *Has this house [the Temple] . . . become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the Lord.*”

It is hard to know **how much trouble Jesus intended to cause**, but at least some of his statements seem quite inflammatory; for instance, speaking to his disciples, he says: “*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword*” (Matthew 10:34).

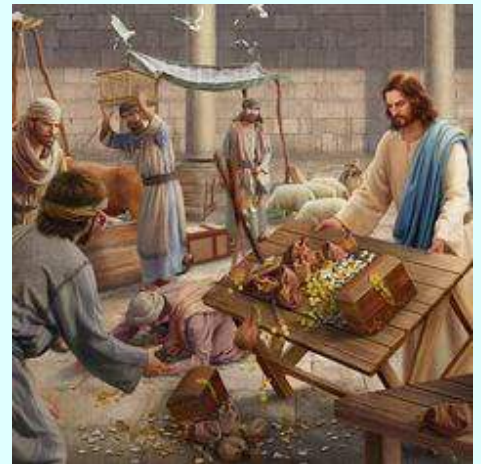
Actually, the money changers and merchants performed an essential service for those who wished to perform those rites. But commercialism seems to have been allowed to invade the sacred precincts of the Temple instead of being kept well outside.

Note: After Jesus’ triumphant entry, as well as the cleansing/clearing of the temple, he also curses a fig tree (not mentioned above). Look

back at page **33** for the differences between Matthew and Mark on the order of these happenings.

Refer back to Jesus’ first clearing/cleansing of the temple, pages **51 – 52**. Also, again refer to the website “Jesus – how many times did he cleanse the temple?”

After this final “triumphant” entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, his three year ministry is almost at an end. The scene now inevitably moves towards the **betrayal, arrest, trial**, sentence and death by Roman crucifixion. In the next section, we look briefly at his betrayal, arrest and trials (plural!).



Jesus cleansing the temple – a second time?

The Betrayal, Arrest and Trials of Jesus

Here we make brief comments about the betrayal, arrest and trials of Jesus. It assumes that the reader has some familiarity with the accounts given in the gospels.

The betrayal and arrest of Jesus

Judas and the 30 pieces of silver

Jesus was betrayed by Judas Iscariot, one of the 12 disciples. The 30 pieces of silver was the price for the betrayal, according to an account in the Gospel of Matthew 26:15 in the New Testament.

Before the Last Supper, Judas is said to have gone to the chief priests and agreed to hand over Jesus in exchange for 30 silver coins, and later to have attempted to return the money, filled with remorse for his betrayal.



One possibility for the coins making up the 30 pieces

But one can't help but wonder if Matthew's penchant for Old Testament prophecies hadn't gripped him again as this was the price mentioned by the Zechariah 11:12 (in the Old Testament) in connection with some mysterious [shepherd](#) (nothing to do with a betrayal): “*And I said unto them . . . give me my price;... So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver.*” This – of course – is only mentioned by Matthew!

The Garden of Gethsemane

The arrest of Jesus occurred shortly after the Last Supper and immediately after the kiss of Judas, which is traditionally said to have been an act of betrayal since Judas made a deal with the chief priests to arrest Jesus. All four Gospels describe Jesus' arrest in the [Garden of Gethsemane](#) by a crowd led by Judas Iscariot, one of the 12 disciples.

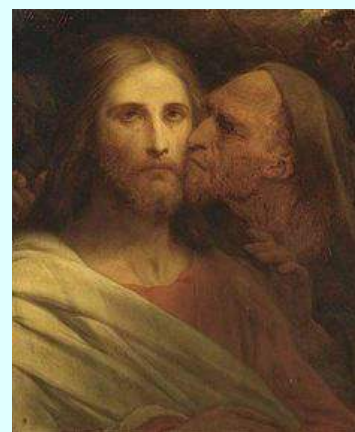


The Garden of Gethsemane as it appears today, with olive trees

Note: The name “Gethsemane” means “oil press” and was just outside the eastern wall of Jerusalem on the western slopes of the Mount of Olives and presumably in an olive grove where once an oil press had stood.

The Judas kiss

To identify Jesus to the arresting group, it was agreed that Judas would go up to Jesus and kiss him. A kiss would be a normal greeting and of no greater significance than a handshake in our culture. But the kiss was used by Judas as a signal to identify Jesus for armed men then to seize Jesus.



The Judas kiss

The meaning of the word “[Iscariot](#)”

The word means a person who betrays another, a traitor. Actually “*Iscariot*” is a misspelling of “*sicariot*” meaning *assassin or murderer*. This was the name given to the most extreme Jews – known as Zealots – who carried a dagger and who believed in outright assassination of Romans and pro-Romans as the most

direct and effective means of fighting foreign domination.

For more on Judas, look at the websites under “Judas Iscariot”.

The six trials of Jesus

In total, Jesus had six trials. Three of these were **religious** (Jewish) trials where he was found *guilty* each time, and three were **civil** (Roman) trials where he was found *innocent* each time. All six trials were carried out on what today we call Good Friday in eight very stormy hours.

The suggestion is that in reading the notes below, readers also refer to references given in the gospels.

Jewish trials

The three *Jewish* religious trials resulted in a death sentence on the charge of **blasphemy**, because Jesus had proclaimed himself the Messiah, God the Son which the Jews did not believe.

- 1 Trial 1 in front of a **Jewish high priest** (John 18:12 – 24).
- 2 Trial 2 in front of **Caiaphas** also called a high priest (Matthew 26:55 – 68).
- 3 Trial 3 in front of the **Sanhedrin**, the highest judicial and religious council in New Testament times, composed of about 70 members (Matthew 27:1 – 2, Luke 22:63 – 71).

The verdict each time – **guilty!**

Roman trials

In the three *Roman* civil trials, Jesus was accused of **treason against Rome** but proclaimed not guilty each time.

- 1 The first civil trial (Roman) was in front of **Pontius Pilate** (John 18:28 – 38).
- 2 The second trial was in front of **Herod Antipas**, who was visiting Jerusalem then (Luke 23:6 – 12).
- 3 Herod Antipas then returned Jesus back to **Pilate** again for a third trial (John 18:39 – 19:16).

The verdict each time – **not guilty!**

But in spite of the three not guilty verdicts, Pilate still gave the order for execution by crucifixion (Matthew 27:26). Note that crucifixion was neither a Jewish nor a Greek method of execution but routine by Roman law. Jesus was executed for the crime of **treason against Rome** – claiming to be a king without Roman approval.

Pilate washes his hands

Luke claims that Pilate, convinced of Jesus’ innocence, spoke three times to the accusing crowd. In Luke 23:13 – 25, Pilate and Herod Antipas said Jesus had done nothing to deserve death so Pilate said he would punish Jesus then release him. But the whole crowd shouted that Jesus be crucified. This happened three times and their shouting prevailed so Pilate decided to grant their demand and surrendered Jesus to their will.

Then, as Matthew 27:24 describes, when Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, “*I am innocent of the blood of this just Person*”.

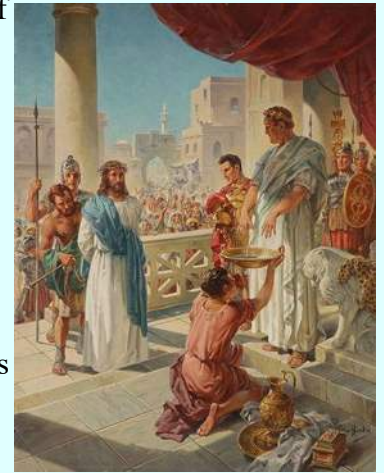
While all four gospels agree that Pilate was reluctant to order the execution of Jesus, only Matthew includes the hand-washing by Pilate (Matthew 27:24). However, hand-washing was *not* a Roman practice but a *Jewish* practice mentioned in the Old Testament (in Deuteronomy), which again is probably why Matthew refers to it. Hand-washing – a dramatic act that makes the English phrase "to wash one's hands of" mean "to disclaim responsibility."

Note: Differences in the gospels: Mark just talks about the *crowd* being against Jesus (Mark 15: 6 – 15). But Matthew's gospel, written about 15 years after that of Mark, in the year 85 AD or so, it's *all the people* (Matthew 27 KJV but not the NIV which also uses "crowd").

By the time you get to John's gospel, written in the AD 90's, it is the *Jews* who are against Jesus (John 19: 12 KJV), or the *Jewish leaders* (John 19: 12 NIV).

Either way, it is important to note that it was *not* Romans who found Jesus guilty but Jews – the people/crowd and the leaders – the chosen race!

For more on these trials of Jesus, refer to the websites on "Jesus' six trials" and "Jesus' trials and problems in these trials".



A painting of Pilate washing his hands. Note again the fair-skinned Jesus in the painting

Was the Pilate story true?

Some sources say the Pilate story is not completely factual as a tradition of forgiving or allowing the *crowd* to choose a person to be released was *never* part of Roman law or tradition. The reason for his declaration of innocence three times was to absolve the Romans of guilt.

When the gospels were finally written, many years after Jesus' death, there was a great effort for the Christians to separate themselves from Jews who had caused so much trouble in the death of Jesus. So the tradition was deliberately modified to place the blame on Jews and *not* Romans. Of course, when the gospels were written, the Romans were in control and the Christians were subject to their power. This was perhaps a political move by Christians to ensure that the Christian movement stayed alive and was not destroyed by the Romans.....It worked.

Refer also to the website on "Pontius Pilate – was the Pilate story true?"

Who was really to blame for the death of Jesus?

This is actually a difficult question to answer!

We could start with *Judas* as it was he who betrayed Jesus and started the whole chain of events that led to Jesus' death.

Who do the *synoptic gospels* blame?

We get differences. In Mark 14:1, we have the *chief priests and the teachers of the law* were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. But in the next chapter, Mark just talks about the *crowd* being against Jesus (Mark 15: 6 – 15). In Matthew's gospel, written 15 years about after that of Mark, in the year 85 AD or so, it's *all the people* (Matthew 27 KJV but not the NIV which also uses "crowd"). But then, just two

chapters later, it is the *religious leaders* – chief priests and the Sanhedrin – looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death (Matthew 26:59). It is the *leaders* who are blamed and not the Jews generally for disciples were also Jews.

Who does *John's gospel* blame?

Both Pilate the Roman *and* the crowd are to blame, though Pilate did think Jesus was innocent (John 18:31 – 32). Still, Pilate did sentence Jesus to die by crucifixion, which was a *Roman* punishment. Though Pilate did try to set Jesus free (John 19:12).

However John's gospel was written at a time when Christianity had become almost entirely *Gentile* and completely withdrawn from Judaism and Christians were out of sympathy with the Jews. John seems to feel that party distinctions amongst the religious leaders (e.g. Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes) would be lost on his (Gentile) audience, and usually refers to Jesus' opponents simply as "*Jews*".

Note: This general reference to Jews in John, where the synoptics speak of specific parties among the Jews, helped rouse antipathy against Jews on the part of Christians in *later centuries*. It helped give rise to the common oversimplification that "the Jews killed Christ," as though all Jews of Jesus' time were equally responsible and as though all of Jesus' early disciples from Peter to Paul were not themselves Jews.

How about God himself?

It was all part of God's plan of salvation. *Jesus had to die* for our sins and to bring us back into a relationship with God. Jesus said to Pilate, "*You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above* (John 19:11).

Refer also to the websites under "Jesus' death – who is to blame?"

False messiahs

Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, died at the hands of the Romans. But as mentioned earlier (page 4), he was not the only Jewish person who claimed to be the Messiah. Many itinerant preachers with Messianic pretensions had arisen and every one of them had some following. But all had failed. To the high priests, Jesus would only be one more of these "false Messiahs."

Thus the earthly work of this man Jesus, unsurpassed in his obedience to God, his humanity, his love, and his teaching, is over. However, in the eyes of most of his followers of his time, his failure to bring about the kingdom of heaven on earth was total.

Throughout the discussion above, there has been mention of Jesus' travels, acts and miracles, but almost no mention of Jesus' parables nor his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. The parables are briefly commented on below. But the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension will – hopefully! – be the subject of a future project.

The Parables of Jesus

The word **parable** comes from a Greek word meaning "*comparison*". In the biblical sense, it is a simple story, with human characters, used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson.

Jesus taught many parables, about 42 in total. All of these (I think) were in the second and third years of his ministry. Jesus always spoke to the crowds using parables. Cf. Matthew 13:34: "*All these things Jesus spoke to the crowd in parables, and he did not speak to them at all without using parables...*"

Why did Jesus use parables – and why so many?

Even the disciples asked Jesus this question. Cf. Matthew 13:10 (after Jesus had told the parable about the sower – #1 in the list below) "*The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"*"

Then further down in verses 34 – 35 (after the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast) "*Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: 'I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world'*" (though Matthew this time does not state *which* Old Testament prophet it was!).

Speaking in parables may have been a rational response to the gathering force of Jesus' enemies. For Jesus to speak *directly* concerning his unorthodox religious views might further enrage the religious leaders and perhaps even bring down upon his head political dangers. By speaking in parables, those unsympathetic to him could be fobbed off with the *literal* tale (e.g. its just a story about *a man planting seeds*), while those who sympathised with Jesus would have no trouble seeing the point.

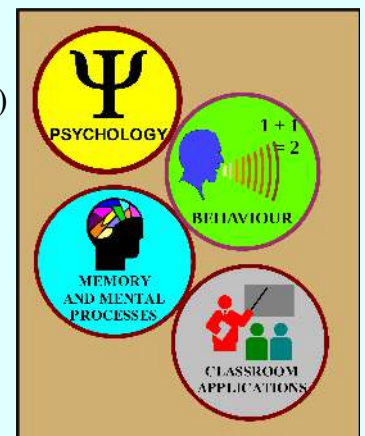
Although Jesus preached so strikingly in parables, he did *not* create a new literary genre. Rather, he made brilliant use of a genre of teaching which was already of long tradition and which was familiar to all throughout the Mediterranean world, especially Greece and Rome.

It is interesting to note that even though the crowds may have understood the parables, the disciples did not always seem to understand. For example, in the parables of "The weeds in the field" and "The mustard seed" (#8 and #9 in the list below): Matthew 13: 36 "*Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field"* which Jesus then explained (in verses 37 – 40).

Good psychology of learning and teaching

Another advantage of teaching using parables is because they use good psychology of teaching and learning. For example, the use of "*concrete*" (real) stories which listeners can readily picture in their minds and understand, enables them to more easily remember not only the stories but also the spiritual messages contained in them. This is a far more effective way of teaching and learning than just telling or preaching highly *abstract* messages which, unfortunately, happens too much in churches!!

Readers may like to refer to an earlier project of mine on "*Psychology of*



Learning and Teaching” shown above in this list of projects. This project is based on the notes used in the course of the same title taught by me at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) to students training to be secondary school teachers in Hong Kong.

When asked by his disciples “*Why do you talk to them in parables?*” Jesus tells them but doesn’t seem, at least to me, to give a reason that fits in with modern psychology. Refer again to Matthew 13:10 – 17, 34 – 35; Mark 4:10 – 12, 33 – 34; Luke 8:9 – 10.

The parables of Jesus are found *only* in the synoptic gospels. They form approximately one third of his recorded teachings. Jesus's parables are simple and memorable stories, often with imagery, and all teach a lesson in our daily lives. Although, the messages the parables convey are deep, and central to the teachings of Jesus.

Many of Jesus's parables refer to simple *everyday* things, such as:

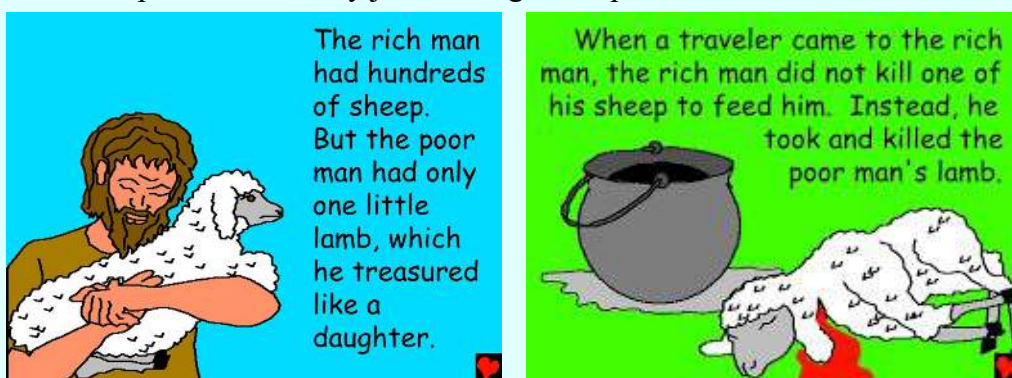
- a woman baking bread (the parable of the yeast, #10 in the list below),
- a man knocking on his neighbour's door at night (the parable of the friend at midnight, #15), and
- the aftermath of a roadside mugging (the parable of the Good Samaritan, #14 in the list).

Yet they all deal with major religious themes, such as the growth of the Kingdom of God, the importance of prayer, and the meaning of love.

In all times in their history, the Jews were familiar with teaching by means of parables and a few parables also exist in the Old Testament but are found mainly in the New Testament. The use of parables by Jesus was hence a natural teaching method that fit into the tradition of his time.

A famous example of an Old Testament parable is the parable of the **Ewe Lamb** which the prophet Nathan addressed to King David. After the king had arranged the death of Bathsheba's husband on the battlefield so that he might himself marry Bathsheba, Nathan told him this story. You can find it in the book of 2 Samuel, chapter 12 (or go to website “Parable of the Ewe Lamb”).

Do you understand the parable – even by just looking at the pictures below?



The **New Testament parables** below are found *only* in the three synoptic gospels. In John’s gospel, *allegories* are found but **no parables**.

Allegory vs parable

Many people believe an allegory and a parable are the same thing, but there are some major differences. An **allegory** is usually an image, poem or story whose interpretation can communicate a hidden meaning. In contrast, a **parable** is a simple story that is used to illustrate moral or spiritual lessons.

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 24. Lost silver coin | Luke 15:8 – 10 |
| 25. Prodigal (Lost) son | Luke 15:11 – 32 |
| God's love concluded | |
| 26. Shrewd, but dishonest manager | Luke 16:1 – 13 |
| 27. Rich man in hell; Lazarus in Heaven (the same Lazarus raised from the dead) | Luke 16:19 – 31 |
| 28. A servant's duty | Luke 17:7 – 10 |
| 29. Persistent widow and unjust judge | Luke 18:1 – 8 |
| 30. Pharisee and the tax-collector | Luke 18:9 – 14 |
| 31. The ten pounds | Luke 19:11 – 27 |
| 32. The unforgiving servant | Matthew 18:21 – 35, Luke 17:3b – 4 |
| 33. Vineyard workers paid the same wage | Matthew 20:1 – 16 |

The Last Week in Jerusalem

Those who won't accept God:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 34. Two sons called to work | Matthew 21:28 – 32 |
| 35. Wicked tenants of the vineyard | Matthew 21:33 – 46; Mark 12:1 – 12; Luke 20:9 – 19 |
| 36. Invitations to the banquet | Matthew 22:1 – 14 |

Being prepared for the end-times and the return of Jesus:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 37. Lesson of the fig-tree | Matthew 24:32 – 35; Mark 13:28 – 31; Luke 21:29 – 33 |
| 38. Thief and the householder | Matthew 24:42 – 44 |
| 39. Servants and the returning master | Matthew 24:45 – 51; Mark 13:34 – 37 |
| 40. Ten bridesmaids or virgins | Matthew 25:1 – 13 |
| 41. Talents of money (cf. #31) | Matthew 25:14 – 30 |
| 42. Sheep and the goats | Matthew 25:31 – 46 |

Did Jesus or the gospel writers create the parables?

There is some doubt as to whether or not Jesus spoke *all* the above parables or whether they were created by others, such as the gospel writers. Consider the parables of the Good Samaritan (#14 in the list above) and the Prodigal Son (#25 in the list).

The evidence points towards the real author of the parable of the Good Samaritan being [Luke](#). As with all 17 unique parables in Luke's gospel, it is a more *realistic* story which is probably Luke's own composition, and which anyone could imagine as really happening. (Cf. the parables in the gospel of [Mark](#), which are mainly about *nature* though he did introduce people into his parable of the vineyard – #35 above).

However, as well as being literally realistic, allegory is not absent. Samaritans, remember, were people whom Jews despised and this was a “good” Samaritan. The pious Jews in the story – the priest and the Levite – do not come off too well! Similarly, the parable of the Prodigal Son (#25 above) is very realistic but the message is that God's love for us does not depend on our faithfulness; it is unconditional. He loves us while we are still sinners.

A further note: Stories such as the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son are also familiar from the Old Testament. The Good Samaritan has similarities with the story in 2 Chronicles 28 (especially versus 5 – 15), while the Prodigal Son story has similarities with the story in Isaiah 30. [I will leave it to the reader to look up these passages and see if they see similarities.]

Refer also to the websites on “Parables”, “Parable of the Good Samaritan” and “Parable of the Good Samaritan and similar parables – origins”.

Summary: Main Points

A summary is included as it can be difficult to recall accurately the main points when there is so much information – and that includes me too, and I wrote the article!

Jesus and the Gospels: an introduction

- The Old Testament is the covenant or agreement between God and Moses/Hebrews/people of Israel that came into effect in the time of Moses.
- The New Testament is the covenant or agreement between God and the Jewish people instituted by Christ to come into effect after His death.

The Gospels

- The gospels are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They deal with the life, ministry, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.
- The first three gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke – are known as the "Synoptic Gospels". The content of the gospel of John is often distinct from that in the other three gospels.
- The Gospels were written: Mark (written first) c. AD 69 – 70, Matthew c. AD 85, Luke c. AD 95, John c. AD 100.
- In this project, we take the year of birth of Jesus to be 4 BC and the year of his death to be AD 33.
- Jesus was a Jewish itinerant preacher. There were many such preachers at that time among Jewish people. It was part of the culture of the Jewish people at that time. Their messages often differed.
- John the Baptist was an itinerant preacher. Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist and then began his adult ministry and became an itinerant preacher and healer himself.
- Many itinerant preachers ended up being executed and this included John the Baptist and Jesus.
- Two historians of the time, the Roman historian Tacitus (c. AD 55 – 118) and Flavius Josephus (c. AD 37 – 100) believed Jesus existed.
- Christianity began as one of other sects among Judaism. But unlike other sects, Christianity did not disappear.

The Setting for the Gospels; the Land of Israel

- The land of Israel in the first century AD was divided into five main provinces: Judea, Galilee, Perea, Samaria and Iturea. The first three of these provinces were Jewish. Samaria and Iturea were predominantly Gentile provinces.
- The Israelites descended from those who escaped from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. King David consolidated the various tribes under his single rule and chose the city of Jerusalem as his capital. Solomon, David's son, built what was known as the [First Temple](#).
- Later, following an internal rebellion, Israel split into two separate kingdoms – Israel in the north with Samaria as its capital and Judah in the south with its capital still at Jerusalem.
- In the subsequent centuries, Israel was attacked by many countries, including Assyria, Babylonia, Persia and Greece (in that order).
- Assyria, who had taken some of the population of the northern kingdom (Israel) to Assyria, replaced them with outsiders who lived in the part of Israel that later became known as Samaria. The population of Galilee in the very north of Israel though, in northern Israel remained depleted for more than 500

years.

- In 587/6 BC. the Babylonians did the same to Judah in the south but only for about 50 years until the Persians took over. The **Second Temple** was then built to replace the **First Temple** destroyed by the Babylonians.
- In 332 BC, the Greeks under Alexander the Great took over the Middle East including Israel.
- In 170 BC, the Hasmonean revolted against the Greeks resulted in the re-establishment of traditional religious Jewish practices in the temple in Jerusalem. At this time, Galilee was re-populated with Jews from Judea.
- Rome then intervened and appointed Herod the Great as king of Judea, reigning from 37 – 4 BC.
- The people of Judea resisted Roman occupation leading to several revolts between AD 66 – 136. In AD 70, during the first revolt, the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the **Second Temple**.
- A key Roman ruler of the time was Pontius Pilate.
- Key Jewish rulers were those of the Herodian dynasty: Herod the Great and three of his sons – Herod Antipas, Philip II and Herod Archelaus who ruled different areas of Israel during the time of Jesus.
- The Romans indirectly helped to spread the gospel through (1) the Pax Romana, (2) excellent roads and (3) maintaining Greek as the universal language of literature and communication between cultures.

The Four Gospels and the Story of Jesus

- Apart from the four gospels, other gospels existed but were never included in the New Testament. These included the gospels of Thomas, Philip, Mary and Peter.
- Under Roman Emperor Constantine, who had converted to Christianity, a concerted effort was made to standardise Christian doctrines and to promote an agreed canon of New Testament scriptures.
- The conversion of Emperor Constantine was the single reason Christianity did not die out.
- The gospel authors were not eyewitnesses to the life on Jesus; most just received oral and some written accounts passed on to them.
- Jesus spoke the Aramaic language and not Hebrew.
- The New Testament was written in Greek and an Aramaic source text was used for portions of the New Testament, especially the gospels.
- The four gospels are *not biographies* of Jesus, nor are they *history* of the times as we would define the word “history”. Rather they are a *theological* explanation for the events in the life of Jesus as understood by the different gospel writers. For this reason, there will never be complete agreement between them. Also, the order of events is *not* always chronological.
- The portraits of Jesus in each of the four gospels differ, who he was and why he was here.
- The nativity stories in Matthew and Mark differ a lot. Matthew has the star and the Magi; Luke has the a stable, manger and the shepherds.
- In c. AD 39, the Council of Jerusalem decided how to bring Gentile converts to Christianity into what started off as Jewish Christianity.

Gospel of Matthew

- Written anonymously in c. AD 40 – 50 in Aramaic and c. AD 70 in Greek, and later attributed to a “Matthew”, possibly a tax-collector for the Romans.
- Possibly written in Roman Syria in the city of Antioch.
- Written by a Jewish author steeped in Jewish tradition for a Jewish audience and especially Jewish

Christians.

- Frequent references are made to show that events in the life of Jesus are the fulfilment of prophecies made in the Old Testament.
- The gospel of Matthew traces Jesus' ancestry back to Abraham, father of the Jews. Jesus is portrayed as the new Moses and also as from the line of King David.
- Matthew, with reference to the Old Testament, states that Mary the mother of Jesus was a virgin.

Gospel of Mark

- Also written anonymously possibly in c. AD 70 at the *latest*, after the failure of the First Jewish Revolt (AD 66 – 73) and the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans in AD 70.
- Mark was probably born in Cyrene in Libya and was a Greek speaker. He was possibly a Gentile.
- Possibly written in Rome or Alexandria (Egypt) or Syria.
- Possibly written for citizens of the Roman world, for those not familiar with Jewish customs, which he needed to explain.
- The first gospel to be written – and the shortest – but placed second in the New Testament.
- Begins with Jesus as an adult and starts with John the Baptist and the baptism of the adult Jesus then proceeds to his ministry and death (but no resurrection appearances).
- Mark believed the best disciples were women, the sick, and the Gentiles.

Gospel of Luke

- Again anonymous but believed to be Luke the Evangelist, a friend and travelling companion of the apostle Paul. Written c. AD 95. The longest of the four gospels.
- Luke was born a Greek, in the Hellenistic (Greek) city of Antioch, Syria. He was possibly a gentile.
- Written in a Greek setting, perhaps Antioch, Ephesus, Smyrna or the region of Achaia in southern Greece.
- Aimed at a Greek audience and Gentile Christians in the new Christian religion that was splitting from Judaism.
- Luke traces Jesus' ancestry back to Adam, father of the human race. He gives noticeable attention to women.
- Notable for the fact that Jesus spends more time with the poor and outcasts than in any other gospel.

Gospel of John

- Again unnamed; 46% or more of the gospel content is unique.
- The last gospel to be written, probably c. AD 100. Probably written in Ephesus.
- Written for the whole Christian Church – Jew, Greek and Roman.
- It is the most overtly theological gospel. It omits any mention of the ancestry, birth and childhood of Jesus.
- The narrative of the gospel begins far earlier than the other three. While Mark begins with Jesus' baptism and adult ministry, and Matthew begins with his physical birth, John opens with the beginning of all creation.
- In John's gospel, many of Jesus' speeches begin with "I am" which is a reference to when Moses asked God his name.

Jesus' Early Years – Birth and Childhood

- There are three main events in the Jesus' early years. These involve: John the Baptist, Jesus' birth, and the first visit of Jesus, as a boy (not a baby), to Jerusalem.

1 John the Baptist

- John the Baptist was a cousin of Jesus, born about six months before Jesus. He lived in a small village close to Jerusalem.
- He became an itinerant preacher and got his name as he called his followers to be baptised. He had a large following.
- His preaching presented a serious challenge to the Roman authority. He was arrested and imprisoned by Herod Antipas for criticising Antipas' illicit marriage to Herodias his brother's wife. This probably occurred not too long after he had baptised Jesus.
- He was executed by Antipas, probably in AD 28 – 29 following a rash promise to Salome, his stepdaughter.

2 Birth and childhood of Jesus

- Accounts in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. But they differ, including the story of the nativity.
- According to Matthew, Jesus was born in Bethlehem in 4 BC, the same year Herod the Great died.
- As Herod the Great wanted to kill Jesus, the holy family fled to Egypt. On returning, they went to Nazareth to live.
- According to Luke, Jesus' family lived in Nazareth but went to Bethlehem for his birth.
- The baby Jesus was presented at the temple in Jerusalem 40 days after his birth then the family returned to Nazareth.

3 Jesus presented in the temple at age 12

- At age 12, Jesus was presented in the temple in Jerusalem at the Jewish Festival of the Passover.
- Jesus grew up as a carpenter. He had four younger brothers and several younger sisters.
- We hear nothing about Jesus between the ages of 12 and 30.

The three-year ministry of Jesus

- Believed to have occupied three years from AD 27 until his death in AD 30.
- Much of Jesus' three-year ministry took place in Galilee and the nearby region. Part of the reason was because of distinct differences between Galilee and the southern province of Judea including linguistic, historical, political, economic and culture differences.

The first year of Jesus' ministry: AD 27 – 28

- Mostly in the Galilee area, with a few in Judea (including Jerusalem) and one – just one – in Samaria.
- His ministry begins when he is baptised in the River Jordan by John the Baptist in the region of Perea. This is followed by his temptation by the devil and the calling of his first six (perhaps) disciples.
- Then back to Galilee and his first miracle (changing water into wine at a wedding in Cana).
- In nearby Capernaum where his preaching commenced and when he (may have) called Matthew the (hated) tax collector to become a disciple.
- Jesus goes down to Jerusalem to make his first visit as an adult for the Passover festival.
- Back to Galilee via Samaria where he meets and talks with a Samaritan woman at a well.
- Back to Galilee for more preaching and healing.
- He is rejected by people in his home-town on Nazareth. Because of this, and for other reasons, Jesus

moved to and lived in Capernaum.

The second year of Jesus' ministry: AD 28 – 29

- All but one event in the second year of Jesus' ministry took place in Galilee. The happenings start in Capernaum and continue around Galilee.
- There is only one event outside the Galilee region, which is in Jerusalem for Jesus' second passover.
- Back in Galilee again where more healing occurs. Jesus also delivers the Sermon on the Mount and tours the region with his 12 disciples.

The third and final year of Jesus' ministry: AD 29 – 30

- The happenings in Year Three resemble an expanded version of Year One.
- As this is the last year of Jesus' life there are more happenings in Jerusalem and the surrounding region.
- In Nazareth, he is rejected for a second time.
- He continues through Galilee and sends out the 12 apostles to preach the gospel.
- The miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 near Bethsaida on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee.
- This is followed by the incident when Jesus walks on water in the Sea of Galilee.
- Jesus and his disciples make excursions to Tyre and Sidon north of Galilee and to Decapolis to the east where more miracles occur along with his preaching.
- In Decapolis there is the feeding of the 4,000.
- Later, north a little to Caesarea Philippi where Peter makes his confession.
- In the nearby Mt Hermon region. Jesus' transfiguration takes place.
- Back to Capernaum where Jesus pays the temple tax with a coin from a fish!
- Jesus leaves Capernaum and Galilee for the last earthly time to go to Jerusalem via Samaria.
- In Samaria he performs a miracle and suffers some rejection.
- Jesus arrives in Jerusalem for the Feast of the Tabernacles and the Feast of Dedication ("Hanukkah") and continues to perform miracles.
- In Bethany, close to Jerusalem, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.
- Back to Jerusalem via Jericho and the Mount of Olives for the last time in his life, Jesus makes his triumphant entry into the city.
- In Jerusalem, Jesus cleanses the temple of money changers and merchants.

The betrayal, arrest and trials of Jesus

- Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' disciples, betrays Jesus to the chief priests for the price of 30 pieces of silver.
- The arrest of Jesus occurs in the Garden of Gethsemane, just outside the eastern wall of Jerusalem, when Judas identifies Jesus by giving him a kiss.
- Jesus then undergoes a series of six trials. Three of these were religious (Jewish) trials where he was found guilty each time, and three were civil (Roman) trials where he was found innocent each time.
- The three religious trials took place first in front of a Jewish high priest, then Caiaphas, then the Sanhedrin.
- The three Roman trials took place first in front of Pontius Pilate, then Herod Antipas and then again in front of Pontius Pilate.

- Pilate, who saw that he could not prevail at all, but that a tumult amongst the Jewish crowd was rising, took water and washed his hands saying he was innocent of the blood of Jesus.

The parables of Jesus

- Jesus taught many parables, about 42 in total. He always spoke to the crowds using parables, which was a widely-used teaching method throughout the Mediterranean world, especially Greece and Rome.
- Teaching using parables is good because they use good ideas from the psychology of teaching and learning.
- The parables of Jesus are found only in the synoptic gospels.
- Parables are occasionally found in Old Testament times but are mainly found in the New Testament.
- The Gospel of Luke contains both the largest total number of parables (24) and 17 (18?) unique parables.
- Some of the parables may have been created by gospel writers (especially Luke) rather than by Jesus, e.g. the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Glossary

Here is a list of difficult or specialised words used in this project together with their definitions or meanings, in alphabetical order.

Allegory: Usually an image, poem, or story whose interpretation can communicate a hidden meaning (cf. parable).

Apocalypse: A great catastrophe that results in widespread destruction or the collapse of a civilization or even the end of the world.

Apostle: Similar to the word “missionary” – one who is sent away on a mission.

Atheist: A person who denies or disbelieves the existence of a supreme being.

Bible: From the Greek phrase *ta biblia*, meaning "the books."

Canon: A biblical canon is a set of texts (also just called "books") which a particular Jewish or Christian religious community regards as part of the Bible.

Chronology: The dates and sequence of past events.

Country bumpkin: An unsophisticated person from a rural area of a country.

Decapolis: (meaning “ten cities”) A region east and south-east of Galilee.

Ethnarch: A term used for any ruler of a people or province in parts of the Roman Empire.

Gentile: Any person who is not Jewish.

Gospel: From the Anglo-Saxon for “god spell” meaning “good news”.

Hellenistic: Of or relating to Greek history, culture, or art after Alexander the Great. Hellenistic Judaism was Judaism in the Greek-speaking world, including those Jews who spoke Greek.

Itinerant: Travelling from place to place to do work or duty.

Jew: Anyone who belonged to one of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Litmus test: A test in which a single factor (such as an attitude, event, or fact) is decisive.

Manger: A trough or an open box in which feed for livestock is placed.

Messiah: Means "the anointed one."

Parable: (from a Greek word meaning "comparison") In the biblical sense, it is a simple story, with human characters, used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson.

Pax Romana: Literally means "Roman peace".

Procurator: The title of a “second-in-command” to a Roman governor.

Sanhedrin: The highest judicial and religious council in New Testament times, composed of about 70 members.

Stable: A building for the shelter and feeding of certain domestic animals.

Synoptic Gospels: Meaning "taking the same view" or "with one eye" because they include many of the same stories, often in a similar sequence and in similar or sometimes identical wording.

Testament: An agreement (or covenant) between people or groups.

Tetrarch: One of four joint rulers of a kingdom, which can include an ethnarch (from the Greek *tetra-* = four, and *-arch* = ruler).

Theology: This term comes from two Greek words that combined mean "the study of God." Christian theology is simply an attempt to understand God.

Transfiguration: A transfiguration is a major change in appearance.

Website References

The following is a list of websites, most of which are referred to in this project. Others are not referred to directly but provide interesting background reading that readers may like to refer to.

Some of the websites are very good, others marginally so. Some of the websites are not too difficult to understand; others are more difficult. There are many other websites available on the Internet for most of the topics discussed in the project, but while some of these may be very good and have been missed, it is just too time consuming to have to search through so many.

The website headings are listed in *alphabetical order*.

Aramaic – the language of Jesus

<https://www.quora.com/Why-did-Jesus-choose-to-speak-Aramaic-a-mixture-of-Hebrew-and-Arabic-did-he-dislike-his-own-Hebrew-mother-tongue>

Asimov's Guide to the Bible: The Old and New Testaments

[*Note: Not referred to directly in the text but covers the four gospels and some of this material was used in preparing the text of this project.*]

<https://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/Asimovs-Guide-to-the-Bible-The-Old-and-New-Testaments.pdf>

Beatitudes

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_of_Beatitudes

Bible – the Jefferson Bible

[*An “extension” website on an American president who wrote his own Bible.*]

<https://history.howstuffworks.com/history-vs-myth/jefferson-bible.htm>

Caesarea Philippi

<https://bible-history.com/biblestudy/ancient-caesarea-philippi>

<https://faith.nd.edu/s/1210/faith/interior.aspx?sid=1210&gid=609&pgid=32180>

Capernaum

<https://biblereadingarcheology.com/2018/03/22/why-did-jesus-move-to-capernaum/>

<http://www.biblebro.net/matthew-4-jesus-moves-to-capernaum-preaches>

<https://www.stthomasdiocese.org/article/sunday-reflection-%C2%A0repent-kingdom-god-hand-september-15-2019>

<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/jesus-historical-jesus/where-jesus-walked/>

Christianity

<https://www.worldhistory.org/christianity/>

Christianity – why didn't it die out in the 1st Century?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/why-didnt-christianity-die-out-in-the-1st-century/z7vn7nb>

Council of Jerusalem (AD 49)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Jerusalem

<https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/how-is-disagreement-resolved-in-the-council-of-acts-15/>

Day of Pentecost

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keys_of_the_kingdom#Day_of_Pentecost_and_message

Do not tell anyone

<https://www.gotquestions.org/do-not-tell.html>

Education in ancient Israel and Judah

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_education_in_ancient_Israel_and_Judah

Fate of the Apostles

[*Note: Not referred to directly in the text but includes the fate of John the Baptist and the 12 disciples of Jesus*]

<https://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/CN500APOSTLES%20FATE.htm>

First and Second Temples

<https://www.moon.com/travel/arts-culture/jerusalem-history-first-second-temples/>

Galilee

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Galilee-region-Israel>

Gnostic Gospels

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/gnostic-gospels/>

Gospel of John

https://www.worldhistory.org/Gospel_of_John/

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/john.html>

Gospel of John – the chronology of Jesus

<https://www.oxfordbiblechurch.co.uk/index.php/teachings/bible-chronology/2572-the-chronology-of-jesus-from-john-s-gospel>

Gospel of Luke

<https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/109#qi1>

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/luke.html>

<https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/node/1754>

Gospel of Mark

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/mmmark.html>

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/mark.html>

Gospel of Matthew – introduction

<https://bibletalk.tv/introduction-to-matthews-gospel>

Gospel of Matthew

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Matthew

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthew_the_Apostle

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/matthew.html>

Gospel of Matthew – significance of ‘14’

<https://mitchchase.wordpress.com/2013/12/26/why-fourteen-generations-in-the-genealogy-of-matthew-1/>

<https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/nt-difficulties/matthew/mt-117-why-does-matthew-emphasize-14-generations/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthew_1:17

<https://bibleproject.com/blog/jesus-genealogies/>

Gospels and chronology (and contradictions)

<https://www.beholdingjesus.com/the-gospels-and-chronology/>

<https://dwellcc.org/learning/essays/problem-apparent-chronological-contradictions-synoptics#APPENDIX%20A>

<https://www.beholdingjesus.com/the-gospels-and-chronology/>

Gospels – an introduction to the four gospels

<https://swarthmorepres.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Fourth-Gospel-Introduction-April-2020.pdf>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel>

Gospels – comparing the four gospels

<https://shepherdthoughts.com/baptistchurchny/new-testament-survey-notes-on-the-four-gospels/>

Gospels – historical reliability

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_reliability_of_the_Gospels

Gospels not included in the New Testament canon

<https://www.thegospelofchrist.com/knowledge-base/tgoc-kb--hpb79>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/what-do-the-lost-gospels-tell-us-about-the-real-Jesus/zf6qcqt>

Gospels – an overview

<https://overviewbible.com/four-gospels/>

Gospels – what are they?

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/gospels.html>

Gospels – subjects covered

<https://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/CN650TOPICMatt.htm>

<https://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/CN651TOPICMark.htm>

<https://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/CN652TOPICLuke.htm>

<https://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/CN653TOPICJohn.htm>

Hasmoneans and Hasmonean dynasty

<https://religion.fandom.com/wiki/Hasmonean>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasmonean_dynasty

Hasmonean/Maccabean revolt

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/maccabean-revolt/>

Hanukkah – the story of

<https://www.history.co.uk/articles/the-history-of-hannukah>

Healing on the Sabbath day

<https://412teens.org/qna/why-was-Jesus-healing-on-the-sabbath-such-a-big-deal-to-the-pharisees.php>

<https://www.compellingtruth.org/heal-on-the-Sabbath.html>

Herod – the temple of Herod

<https://rsc.byu.edu/new-testament-history-culture-society/temple-herod>

Herod the Great (+ many others under ‘Topics’)

<https://bible-history.com/herod-the-great/>

<https://study.com/academy/lesson/king-herod-history-reign-death.html>

Herodian dynasty

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herodian_dynasty

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antipater_the_Idumaeon

Herodian Tetrarchy

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herodian_Tetrarchy

History of Jews and Judaism in the Land of Israel

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_and_Judaism_in_the_Land_of_Israel

Illiterate peasants

<https://apologeticsguy.com/2016/10/jesus-disciples-illiterate-peasants/>

Israel – history of

<https://www.worldhistory.org/israel/>

Itinerant preachers in the time of Jesus

<https://www.nairaland.com/3005421/christianity-religion-not-founded-jesus/6>

<https://subsplash.com/standtoreason/media/mi/+181ebe9>

Jericho sycamore tree YouTube video (one of many)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z2nZCBQx-RQ>

Jesus – anointing of

<https://answersingenesis.org/contradictions-in-the-bible/how-many-times-was-jesus-anointed/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anointing_of_Jesus

Jesus – baptism

<https://www.npr.org/2020/05/29/863380875/where-jesus-was-baptized-jordan-vies-with-israel-for-tourists>

Jesus – birth

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virgin_birth_of_Jesus

Jesus – calling of the disciples

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calling_of_the_disciples#Gospel_of_John

<https://www.gotquestions.org/order-calling-Jesus-disciples.html>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commissioning_of_the_Twelve_Apostles

Jesus – could he read and write?

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-SEB-76135>

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/could-jesus-read-and-write>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_education_in_ancient_Israel_and_Judah

Jesus' death – who is to blame?

<https://www.christianity.com/wiki/jesus-christ/who-is-to-blame-for-jesus-death.html>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zdryd6f/revision/12>

Jesus – did he exist? Searching for evidence beyond the Bible

https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/jesus-historical-jesus/did-jesus-exist/?mqsc=E3862010&utm_source=WhatCountsEmail&utm_medium=BHDDaily

https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/jesus-historical-jesus/did-jesus-exist/?mqsc=E3862010&utm_source=WhatCountsEmail&utm_medium=BHDDaily%20Newsletter&utm_campaign=E6BD12

<https://shepherdthoughts.com/baptistchurchny/not-questioning-the-historical-existence-of-jesus/>

Jesus – feeding the 4,000

<http://www.arlev.co.uk/matt053.htm#2>

Jesus – how far did he walk?

<https://www.artzabox.com/a/community/bible-stories/how-far-did-jesus-walk-from-nazareth-to-jerusalem>

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2015/12/17/where-did-jesus-travel-while-on-earth/>

Jesus – how many times did he cleanse the temple?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/temple-cleanse.html>

<https://answersingenesis.org/jesus/when-did-jesus-cleanse-the-temple/>

Jesus – ministry of

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ministry_of_Jesus

https://www.gotquestions.org/content_Jesus_ministry.html

Jesus movement

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/first/themovement.html>

Jesus movement – the modern one

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus_movement

Jesus the “I-AM”

<https://www.gotquestions.org/I-AM.html>

Jesus – the land of Jesus

[*Note: Another useful website but not referred to directly in the text.*]

<https://sites.google.com/site/historyofsalvation/time-of-christ/land-of-jesus>

Jesus – the missing 18 years of his childhood

<https://www.christianity.com/jesus/life-of-jesus/youth-and-baptism/jesus-childhood-the-missing-years.html>

<https://www.history.co.uk/articles/the-lost-years-of-jesus-what-was-he-doing-in-those-missing-18-years>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unknown_years_of_Jesus

Jesus the pig killer?

<https://stream.org/jesus-the-pig-killer/>

Jesus' six trials

<https://www.bible.ca/doctrine-six-trials-of-jesus-3-jewish-guilty-3-roman-innocent.htm>

Jesus' trials and problems in these trials

<https://www.thecollector.com/pontius-pilate-the-man-who-sentenced-jesus-christ-to-death/>

<https://blogs.uoregon.edu/rel223s15drreis/2015/04/23/luke-portrayal-of-jesus-as-innocent-martyr/>

<https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1636/historical-problems-in-the-trials--crucifixion-in/>

Jesus – use of the term “dogs”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthew_7:6

<https://catholicstraightanswers.com/why-does-jesus-refer-to-the-canaanite-woman-as-a-dog/>

<https://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/8619/Dogs.htm>

Jesus – visits to Jerusalem during his adult ministry: how many times?

<https://www.psephizo.com/biblical-studies/how-many-times-did-jesus-visit-jerusalem/>

<https://www.answers.com/religious-studies/>

Jesus – was he really born in Bethlehem?

<https://theconversation.com/was-jesus-really-born-in-bethlehem-why-the-gospels-disagree-over-the-circumstances-of-christs-birth-150828>

Jesus – was he literate?

<https://talesoftimesforgotten.com/2020/11/27/was-jesus-literate/>

<https://www.ancient-origins.net/history-famous-people/jesus-literate-0013908>

https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/8wdi86/was_jesus_literate/

<https://ehrmanblog.org/could-jesus-read/>

Jesus – was it a virgin birth?

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virgin_birth_of_Jesus

Jesus – what did he look like?

<https://allthatsinteresting.com/what-did-jesus-look-like>

<https://kainosproject.com/2022/02/03/what-did-jesus-really-look-like/>

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-a-forensic-pilgrimage-a-scholar-asks-what-did-jesus-look-like/>

Jesus – why did he allow the demons to enter the herd of pigs?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-demons-pigs.html>

Jesus – what was happening in the world at this time?

[Note: An “extension” website but not referred to directly in the text]

<https://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/CN600NTWORLD.htm>

Jewish calendar

<https://www.calendar.com/blog/introduction-to-the-hebrew-calendar-12-facts-you-should-know/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_calendar

Jewish Palestine at the time of Jesus

[Note: Another informative website but not referred to directly in the text]

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jesus/Jewish-Palestine-at-the-time-of-Jesus>

Jewish uprisings against Rome – first and third [AD 66 – 136]

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish%E2%80%93Roman_wars

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bar_Kokhba_revolt

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-bar-kokhba-revolt-132-135-ce>

John the Baptist

https://www.worldhistory.org/John_the_Baptist/

<https://www.angel.com/blog/the-chosen/posts/the-story-of-john-the-baptist-and-jesus>

https://www.biblewise.com/bible_study/questions/ages-of-john-the-baptist.php

<https://truthbook.com/jesus/john-the-baptist/john-the-baptists-birth-and-childhood/>

<https://amazingbibletimeline.com/blog/john-the-baptist-in-the-bible-biography/>

John the Baptist – execution

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beheading_of_John_the_Baptist

John the Baptist – imprisonment

<http://bibleq.net/answer/5317/>

Judaea (Roman province)

[= Judea + Samaria + Idumea from AD 6]

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaea_\(Roman_province\)#Background](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaea_(Roman_province)#Background)

Judas Iscariot

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Judas-Ischariot>

<https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/os-xpm-2003-04-19-0304180488-story.html>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judas_Iscariot

Keys of the kingdom

<https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/what-keys-to-the-kingdom-jesus-gave-peter.html>

Maccabean Revolt & Hasmonean Dynasty

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic_Judaism

Ministry of Jesus (including one year or three)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ministry_of_Jesus

New Testament – how did the NT story come down to us

[Note: Another “extension” website not referred to directly in the text]

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2011/01/the-historical-context-of-the-new-testament?lang=eng>

Old Testament verses in the New Testament

<https://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/CN710OTinNT.htm>

Palestine in Greek times

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/palestine-in-the-hellenistic-age/>

Parables

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/jesus/parables.html>

Parable of the Ewe Lamb

<https://gutenberg.edu/2001/02/the-power-of-the-parables/>

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/nathans-parable-how-greed-ensnares-our-churches/>

Parable of the Good Samaritan

<https://catholicidentity.bne.catholic.edu.au/scripture/SitePages/Luke-10-2937--The-Good-Samaritan.aspx?csf=1&e=MGgr7q>

<https://interestingliterature.com/2021/08/parable-of-the-good-samaritan-summary-analysis-meaning/>

Parable of the Good Samaritan and similar parables – origins

<https://vridar.org/2014/10/16/the-origin-of-the-good-samaritan-parable-and-other-lucan-favourites/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parable_of_the_Good_Samaritan

<https://hermeneutrix.com/2016/10/25/exegetical-exercise-11/>

<https://seminary.bju.edu/theology-in-3d/the-good-samaritan-and-the-good-samaritans/>

<https://alastairadversaria.com/2014/05/04/the-prophet-oded-and-the-good-samaritan/>

Pentecost and the Jewish Feast of Weeks – differences

<http://www.differencebetween.net/miscellaneous/religion-miscellaneous/differences-between-pentecost-and-the-jewish-feast-of-weeks>

People, places and customs of the New Testament

[Note: A very informative website not referred to directly in the text but dealing with many of the topics discussed]

<https://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/CN720People.htm>

Peter's Galilean accent

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.15699/jbl.1391.2020.6>

Pontius Pilate – was the Pilate story true?

<https://qr.ae/prs8wv>

Psychology of Learning and Teaching (both links should be the same)

<http://rmheyworth.byethost11.com/Files/Psychologyoflearningandteaching.pdf>

<http://rmheyworth.boomhost.com/Files/Psychologyoflearningandteaching.pdf>

Samaritans – history and hate

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/the-samaritans-hope-from-the-history-of-a-hated-people.html>

Sermon on the Mount

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sermon_on_the_Mount

<https://www.biblicaljesus.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/basics.tour/ID/9/Sermon.htm>

Sermon on the Mount – was it the same as the Sermon on the Plain?

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/are-the-sermon-on-the-plain-and-sermon-on-the-mount-the-same-thing.html>

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Sermon-on-the-Plain.html>

Seven Differences Between Galilee and Judea in the Time of Jesus

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/7-differences-between-galilee-and-judea-in-the-time-of-jesus/>

Synoptic Gospels & the Gospel of John: 7 Key Differences

<https://www.bartehrman.com/the-synoptic-gospels/>

Synoptic Gospels – apparent chronological contradictions

<https://dwellcc.org/learning/essays/problem-apparent-chronological-contradictions-synoptics#APPENDIX%20A>

Tetrarchs and ethnarchs

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herodian_Tetrarchy

The last passover of Jesus

<https://www.asor.org/onetoday/2014/04/the-last-passover-of-jesus/>

Theology – definition

<https://www.gotquestions.org/what-is-theology.html>

Visual timelines

https://amazingbibletimeline.com/timeline_online/

<https://biblehub.com/timeline/#nt>

<https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/chart-40-00-nt-timeline/>

<https://bibilium.com/timeline-of-jesus-christ-life-on-earth/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_Christianity