

THE life *of* *Jesus*

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF OUR SAVIOR: FOUR LESSONS



THE life of *Jesus*

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Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

Cover and Interior Design: Jeremy Hart (Hart Creative + Design)
Written by: Paul Records



INTRODUCTION

To write the life story of Christ is a daunting task. What words are sufficient? To compact such a life in four simple lessons is akin to putting the universe in your pocket. As daunting as it was, I was aided by four wonderful biographies each written by a disciple who knew Jesus personally. The four gospels are a wealth of information on Jesus and have served as my primary sources. Aided by extra biblical sources and a few books written by journalists and scholars, I have written the following lessons as a brief biography of our Savior.

The Life of Christ is not meant to be comprehensive. Rather, it is designed as a teaching tool to jump start conversations and biblically-based discussions concerning Christ. I have attempted to make this journey a personal one, building each lesson upon one primary theme: redemption. Hopefully, the content that follows will help students see Jesus as personal, passionate, and active. Though the written account of his life was recorded in ancient times, it has never lost its relevance. As a living Savior, Jesus is able to redeem the worst of sinners. His gospel does not end with Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. His gospel story continues to be written as hearts continue to turn to him. As you look back into the first century, it is my prayer and hope that Jesus will increase in your life and also on your campus. As you walk into Scripture, let Christ arise and take the throne of your heart.

Regards,

Paul Records

TEACHER'S NOTES

In the following four lessons, teachers will notice bullet points such as “Read aloud” that provide extra study or context. Though they are optional, they each provide greater detail to the biblical story. All citations are included as footnotes on the bottom of the page and may be referenced for deeper analysis. A highly recommended resource is Fred H. Wight's, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1953), which gives students incredible details into the social life of the ancient near east.

The maps provided in Lessons 1 and 4 are courtesy of Son Light Publishers (© 2007 – 2008 Son Light Publishers, Inc.) and are used with permission. Also included in this curriculum is a four-week reading guide for students that highlights key events in the life of Christ. For the most part, the reading guide follows the chronology of the lessons.

As you teach, remember to work towards reaching the following objectives. They will increase your effectiveness as a communicator, provide a standard of excellence, and make it easier for your students to remember the material.

BE PREPARED

Before you attempt to convey the material in *The Life of Christ*, make sure you're ready.

- Study the curriculum as a whole, make written notes on your copy, and highlight what sticks out to you.
- Consider the setting for your class. Will it be a classroom, auditorium, kitchen table, or living room? Ensure that you have enough chairs for your students and provide pens or pencils if the need arises.
- View the handouts before you pass them out so that you will be familiar with the content. Because these lessons are designed to create discussions and personal reflection, the handouts are limited to one or two pages.
- Encourage your students to follow along using the handouts and give them time at the end of the session to discuss what was covered.

You may even consider writing certain things on a chalkboard or whiteboard, or possibly displaying the PowerPoint slides included with this curriculum if the technology is available. Also be sure to remain aware of whom you are teaching. Stay after each session and mingle with your audience. If certain people are new to the Bible, consider spending more time on certain passages. Make yourself available to answer any questions that arise.

BE PRAYERFUL

If we desire to have a lasting influence and make any spiritual impact on people, we must have the help of Heaven. The week before the course begins, spend extra time in prayer. Clean out your heart in repentance and ask Jesus to guide and direct your thoughts. Pray that your students will understand and remember what they hear. Begin and end each session with a time of prayer.

It is likely that as Jesus leads, certain individuals will express a desire to know more or possibly experience a spiritual new birth if they have not done so already. Prepare your heart to respond if this happens and be ready to tell them about repentance, baptism in Jesus' name, and what it is like to be filled with the Holy Ghost. In every situation, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

BE PASSIONATE

With a topic like God's Holy Word, we should not act as if it is common. The Bible is more than a book; it is a living Word. As you study it, teach it, and explain it, do so with passion. Be enthusiastic about the privilege of telling college students about its truths. With faith, believe that Jesus will anoint you to rescue those that are lost on your campus. You have what it takes. Your campus is waiting.

week one

THE EARLY YEARS | page 8

HIS BIRTH (*Luke 2:1-7*)

THE ADORATION BY THE SHEPHERDS
(*Luke 2:8-20*)

HIS DEDICATION IN JERUSALEM (*Luke 2:21-38*)

FLIGHT INTO EGYPT (*Matthew 2:13-23*)

TEMPLE VISIT AT TWELVE (*Luke 2:41-50*)

HIS BAPTISM (*John 1:29, Matthew 3:13-17*)

HIS TEMPTATION (*Matthew 4:1-11*)

week two

HIS MINISTRY BEGINS | page 15

FIRST TEMPLE CLEANSING (*John 2:13-25*)

HIS SERMON TO NICODEMUS (*John 3:1-21*)

THE CHOICE OF THE TWELVE DISCIPLES
(*Matthew 10:1-4*)

EXECUTION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST
(*Matthew 14:1-12*)

PETER GIVEN THE KEYS (*Matthew 16:13-20*)

week three

THE BEGINNING OF THE END | page 20

HIS TRANSFIGURATION (*Matthew 17:1-13*)

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY (*Matthew 21:1-11*)

HIS PASSION FOR JERUSALEM
(*Matthew 23:37-39, Luke 19:41*)

THE PASSOVER FEAST (*John 13-14*)

week four

HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION | page 25

IN GETHSEMANE (*John 18:1-11*)

HIS ARREST AND TRIALS (*John 18:12-19:15*)

THE CRUCIFIXION (*John 19:16-18*)

THE RESURRECTION (*Matthew 28:1-7*)

POST-RESURRECTION APPEARANCES
(*Luke 24:36-43, John 20:24-28, Acts 1:1-3*)

THE early years

one

As the Old Testament began with man made in the image of God, the New Testament begins with God made in the image of man. The man made in the image of God would be defeated by Satan in the garden of Eden, but God made in the image of man would soundly defeat Satan in the barren desert. Prior to this point in the Biblical story sheep had died for shepherds, but now the Shepherd would die for his sheep.

—H. L. Willmington

THE WORLD IN WHICH HE WAS BORN

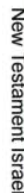
The world of the New Testament was essentially a Greco-Roman world. The conquests of Alexander the Great over 300 years before the time of Christ initiated a revolution of Greek culture. As the first century rolled around, the working language of the people was *koine* Greek, or common Greek.

Though Jesus spoke primarily Aramaic, the common man of the day spoke Greek. This is why the New Testament Scriptures were first written in ancient Greek.

Though Greek was the common language, it was Rome that ruled the Mediterranean region of New Testament times. Much of the roads traveled by New Testament saints were built by Roman slaves and builders. Early Christianity profited from the network of roads and sea transportation that the Romans developed and maintained. The same roads and ship-lanes that Rome developed and built were used by apostolic church leaders to spread the gospel.

The region commonly referred to as “the Holy Land” is contained in the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Today, it is commonly referred to as “the Holy Land.” Though Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he grew up as a carpenter’s son in a town called Nazareth. It is located west of the Sea of Galilee below Cana (where Jesus worked his first miracle). Connecting the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea is the Jordan River, where Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. Eventually, he was put on trial and crucified in Jerusalem.

Looking to the maps that are in the back of many Bibles, one will notice the city of Dan, north of the Sea of Galilee. Then, looking to the left of the Dead Sea, one would find Beersheba. When all of the tribes of Israel were united under King David, the land of Israel stretched from Beersheba in the south



Much of the New Testament story has Roman origins. For example, the word “Palestine” was originally a Roman description. It was the name given to the Holy Land after the Roman ruler Titus destroyed the temple in 70 A.D. The Romans gave the land this name to humiliate and insult the Jews. The word is a derivative of the word *Philistia*, or Philistines, who were longtime enemies of Israel in the Old Testament.

After Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C., a man came to power who would rule all of Rome at the birth of Christ. His name was Octavius, but is known primarily as *Caesar Augustus*. During his reign, the Roman Empire would reach a high point of power and glory known as *Pax Romana* (Latin for “Roman Peace”). During this time of Roman peace, our Lord was born in a lowly manger.

THE FOUR GOSPELS

Viewing the life of Christ, we view the greatest life ever recorded. Amazingly, we have four unique sources from which to view the life of our Messiah. Like four journalists each writing from a different perspective, they describe the words, works, and character of Jesus.

- In **Matthew**, Jesus is a *teacher* and *preacher*.
- In **Mark**, Jesus is a *miracle worker* and *servant*.
- In **Luke**, he is the *perfect man*.
- In **John**, he is the *divine God*.

The first three gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are referred to as the *synoptic gospels*. This indicates that they are similar in point of view and structure and are organized chronologically. John, on the other hand, is not written in chronological order. It opens with an account of creation and then jumps to the ministry of John the Baptist. Over 90% of John’s gospel is unique and is not found in the other three accounts.

Matthew (50-60 A.D.) – Originally written from the perspective of the Jew. Presents Jesus as the Messiah and king predicted by Old Testament prophets. Begins within a genealogy of Christ and often quotes from the Old Testament. Matthew records the sermons of Jesus.

Mark (64-65 A.D.) – Originally written from the perspective of the Gentiles, mainly the Romans. The Roman Empire contained two classes of people: Romans (superior, authoritative, conquerors) and slaves. For the most part, there was no middle class. Mark presents Jesus as a miracle worker with all authority and power, but also as a servant. Mark records many of the miracles of Christ.

Luke (60s A.D.) – Originally written from the perspective of the Greek, which glorified the human individual. (The Greeks created the Olympics; their gods were represented by perfected humans). Luke presents Jesus as the perfect man and discusses his humanity and his compassion for the weak. Luke was a physician and his gospel is the most detailed of the four.

John (85-95 A.D.) – Written to the church, the gospel of John reaffirms the deity of Christ. John’s gospel was written long after the others.

THE EARLY YEARS OF CHRIST

The early years of Christ can be divided in a series of important events.

- **His birth, infancy, and youth**
- **His visit to the temple at twelve**
- **His baptism and temptation**

As we journey through these important events, we discover a common theme: Jesus often used the smallest and most insignificant of things to do His greatest works. With humble beginnings, He illustrates His ability to make much out of the least of things.

HIS BIRTH, INFANCY, AND YOUTH

As a pregnant teenager, Mary held the promise of the world in her womb. Overshadowed by the Holy

Ghost, the birth of her child would be no less than a miracle.

In Mary, there is nothing to suggest the extraordinary. Her home was a place called Nazareth, known for its many vices and criminals. In the opinions of many, nothing good could come from Nazareth. The man Mary was espoused to was a carpenter named Joseph. Though she inherited no favor or honor from her upbringing, she was chosen by Heaven to carry the promised One. Proclaiming her value, an angel foretold the birth of her child.

And when the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed are thou among women. Luke 1:28.

At the leading of the angel, Mary decided to visit her cousin Elisabeth who was pregnant with a child whose fate was eternally connected with that of her own. As Elisabeth was greeted by Mary, the babe leapt in her womb. John, known later as *John the Baptist*, would grow up to be the forerunner of Christ. Even before he was born, he gave testimony to the Messiah (Luke 1:41–45).

Luke, in his account of the birth of Christ, begins by describing the decree that went forth from the palace of Caesar Augustus.

- **Read aloud:** Luke 2:1-7.

One would think that as the promised Messiah, Jesus would have chosen a more majestic entrance into this world. However, He chose the lowliest of places: a manger. Interestingly, the first people to see Him and experience His new-born wonder were not of a royal class. Rather, they were shepherds.

And there abode in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior, which is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:8-11.

Speaking to the shepherds, the angel alluded to the fact that Christ had come to redeem the sins of the entire world. His birth was one which was for “all people.” However, before He was given to the world, His glory was declared by men of a peasant class (Luke 2:15–18). Could it be that this was God’s plan to show the world that the first work of Christ was that of a shepherd?

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. John 1:10.

It was a Jewish custom that on the eighth day, a child was circumcised to identify with the Abrahamic covenant of the Old Testament (Genesis 17:1–16). This could only be accomplished in the temple in Jerusalem. As Mary and Joseph entered the temple to fulfill this covenant, a temple priest named Simeon testified of His divinity.

- **Read aloud:** Luke 2:25–30.

As Simeon declared, this child had come as a “light to the Gentiles,” and was the glory of Israel (Luke 2:32).

In time, Jesus would be worshipped by wise men from the east (Matthew 2:1-12). They would bring him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Leaving Mary and Joseph, the Magi gave warning to the wrath of King Herod. Together, with their child, they left Bethlehem and fled to Egypt. They would return years later after Herod’s death.

And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him. Luke 2:40.

HIS VISIT TO THE TEMPLE AT TWELVE

As they did each year during the Passover, Mary and Joseph journeyed from to Jerusalem to present the customary sacrifice in the temple. After one occasion, Mary and Joseph started on the journey back to Nazareth with their company. Unbeknownst to his parents, Jesus stayed behind and conversed with doctors and religious practitioners in the temple. All who heard this twelve-year-old boy were amazed.

And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. Luke 2:47.

Little did they know that this was a child who would later flip tables and chase out money lenders in this very temple over twenty years later.

HIS BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION

As the time came for Jesus to enter into His ministry, John the Baptist was baptizing people in the Jordan river and preaching a message of repentance. This was a man who spent a large part of his life in the wilderness. Scripture records that his raiment was of camel hair (Matthew 3:4). His diet was one of locusts and wild honey. Though his life was rough to say the least, he was chosen to prepare the way of the Lord.

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire. Matthew 3:11.

On a certain day, as John was baptizing, Jesus came walking unto the shore.

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. John 1:29.

As John baptized Christ, his ministry came to an end and the ministry of the Messiah began.

After leaving the Jordan river, Jesus was led into the wilderness. There, He fasted for forty days and forty nights. While praying, the “tempter” came unto Him.

Satan tried to tempt Jesus on three different occasions. He pressured Jesus to turn stones to bread, this relying upon His own resources. Next, he tried to convince Jesus to throw Himself from off of the temple and thus force the hand of God. Lastly, Satan offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if only He would worship him. In each instance, Jesus responded with Scripture as His authority.

Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Matthew 4:10.

CONCLUSION

In the early years of Christ, we see Him coming into His authority as the Lord and God. He chose the simple things from which to step into the world.

- For a mother, he chose a young ordinary girl.
- For a father, he chose a simple carpenter.
- At his birth, he chose an outdoor stable next to livestock.
- As a hometown, he chose the center of crime and vice.
- For his baptism, he chose a baptizer from the wilderness.
- As preparation for his ministry, he chose not to eat for forty days and nights.

Though He was God, and controlled the forces of Heaven, He came to the earth in the form of humility.

But [Jesus] made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Philippians 2:7–8.

Choosing humble beginnings, Jesus paints a picture of His redemptive reach. His beginning foreshadowed his ending. Born in humility, He also died in humility. Understanding this, we can know that as imperfect as we are, we are perfect candidates for glory. In the hands of the Messiah, we are held by a savior well-accustomed to pain and struggle. When He reaches for you and me, He reaches with scarred hands.

After the first century, the Roman empire began to crumble slowly from within. In time, it would leave monuments made of stone. Great as it was, its influence was only surface level. Christ, however, born in an obscure village on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, built monuments of the heart. *His* influence is limitless.

The world of the New Testament was essentially a Greco-Roman world. The conquests of Alexander the Great over 300 years before the time of Christ initiated a revolution of Greek culture.

- As the first century rolled around, the working language of the people was koine Greek, or common Greek.
- Much of the New Testament story has _____ origins.

Viewing the life of Christ, we view the greatest life ever recorded. Amazingly, we have four unique sources from which to view the life of our Messiah. Like four journalists each writing from a different perspective, they describe the words, works, and character of Jesus.

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- In **John**, he is the *divine God*.
- The first three gospels are referred to as the _____ gospels.

As we journey through the early years of Christ, we discover a common theme: Jesus often used the smallest and most insignificant of things to do His greatest works. With humble beginnings, He illustrates his ability to make much out of the least of things.

Why was Simeon's encounter with Jesus in Luke 2:25–30 significant?

What kind of man was John the Baptist and why was he unique?

How does Philippians 2:7–8 illustrate the early years of Christ?

- Choosing humble beginnings, Jesus paints a picture of his _____.

HIS ministry begins

two

*Once my soul was astray from the heavenly way,
I was wretched and vile as could be.
But my savior in love gave me peace from above,
When he reached down his hand for me.
I was lost and undone when he reached his hand for me.
I was near to despair and he showed me that I could be free.*

—G. E. Wright

EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE FIRST CENTURY

500 years before the birth of Christ, the people of Judah returned from their Babylonian captivity and rebuilt Jerusalem and their treasured temple. A study of the Old Testament books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Haggai give context to this period of restoration.

The returning of the Israelites to the land of Canaan made very apparent the changes that had occurred during their 70-year absence. Outside nations had settled in the region and had brought with them foreign ideas, languages, and systems of religion. This would create political divisions and cultural conflicts that are very apparent in the four Gospels.

If we were to travel to the ancient near east, we would find a world without electricity, air-conditioning, or other modern comforts. Every pot, table, and all tools were made by hand.

The average house had an upper level, a lower level, and a courtyard. In II Kings 4:10, the Shunammite Woman gave the prophet Elisha the upper room in her house. The Passover meal eaten by Jesus and his disciples was eaten in an upper room. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples were gathered in an upper room. Knowing small details such as these helps us to understand the context and environment of the biblical story.

THE JEWISH DINNER TABLE

When we read the four Gospels, we see that at times the ministry of Jesus took Him to the dinner

table. When studying the social life of Israel, we discover that the ordinary food of the average Hebrew was bread, olives, oil, buttermilk, and cheese from their flocks; fruits and vegetables from their orchards and gardens; and meat on rare occasions.¹

Many people ate raw grain, a custom that dates back to very ancient times. Interestingly, some Arabs of modern times still pluck the ears of grain and eat them after rubbing them in their hands.

- For New Testament examples of this practice, refer to Luke 6:1 and Mark 2:32.

Another food common to New Testament culture was parched grain, prepared from grains of wheat not fully ripe. Roasted in a pan or on an iron plate, parched grain was eaten either with bread or by itself.

- For Old Testament examples of parched grain, refer to 1 Samuel 17:17 and 1 Samuel 25:18.

Even though people of the day ate fruits, vegetables, and meat on occasion, bread was the principal food. According to one scholar, it is estimated that three-fourths of the people lived entirely upon bread or upon that which was made from wheat or barley flour.²

In Scripture, the phrase “eating bread” was the equivalent to eating any meal.³ Because bread played such a big part in their lives, Jews would never slice or cut it with a knife. In the ancient near east, the custom was “breaking” bread, or tearing it with the hands.

Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave to his disciples. Matthew 26:26.

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them. Acts 20:7.

Among the Jews, there were two main types of bread eaten during a meal: wheat bread and barley bread. In biblical days, there was a very clear distinction between the two. Barley bread was used by the poorer classes, whereas if a family was able to have wheat bread, that family usually had some kind of significant financial status.⁴

In John 6:9, before Jesus fed the 5,000, a lad came to Jesus with two fishes and five barley loaves, which were a picture of the financial state of his family. Having barley bread in his satchel, it was likely that the boy was poor.

To bake bread, Jews would heat up a large flat stone on which they would place cakes of dough.⁵ Often, in a village or town, there were semi-public ovens and it was common to find “public bakers,” because not every family had the means to build or acquire their own ovens.

These clues help us to understand the words of Christ when He made statements such as, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). By challenging people to pray in this manner, Jesus challenged the people to completely trust Him for their provision.

In John 6, Jesus used the status of bread in Jewish society as a metaphor for teaching.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven; For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. (32–33)

¹ Fred H. Wight, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1953), 48.

² *Customs of Bible Lands*, Wight, 44.

³ In Genesis 43, the Bible says the Egyptians would not “eat bread” with the Hebrews. Saying this was paramount to saying that the Egyptians wouldn’t eat with the Hebrews at all.

⁴ *Customs of Bible Lands*, Wight, 46.

⁵ In 1 Kings 19:6, when the prophet Elijah escaped from the wicked Queen Jezebel, God sent an angel and brought Elijah bread “baken on the coals.”

I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. (35)

I am the bread which came down from heaven. (41)

Verily, Verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. (47-51)

Speaking in this manner, Jesus spoke in terms that the common person could understand. His message was clear. Many times, he used parables as a means to connect everyday things with spiritual ideas.

HIS MISSION

After His temptation in the wilderness, the three-year ministry of Jesus began. One of His first deeds took Him to the temple in Jerusalem.

And the Jews' Passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers' money, and overthrew the tables. And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. John 2:13-16.

It is significant that the first act of Jesus was one of cleansing. This act mirrored His ultimate act upon the cross as he cleansed the world of its penalty due to sin. This is not the only time Jesus walked into the worldly commerce of the Temple and turned over tables (He did it twice). To Him, the temple was a picture of a heart lost in sin and unrighteousness. It was for your heart and mine that Jesus lived to save.

For the son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. Luke 19:10.

HIS RAGTAG BAND

As Jesus began His earthly ministry, He formed a group of disciples. These twelve individuals became His inner circle and He brought them with Him as he traveled.

- **Read aloud:** Matthew 10:1—4.

In the case of Andrew and Peter, Jesus came to them while they were casting their nets into the sea and beckoned, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:18—19). This statement indicated two things. First, it indicated that Jesus would make, form, and shape these brothers into a vessel fit for good use. Though we remember the disciples as spiritual giants and pioneer missionaries, they were not always great. Reading between the lines over the course of the gospels, we see that in the beginning they were religious rejects, men with bad tempers, dirty fisherman, and either insecure or full of pride. Yet, Jesus invited them to follow Him.

Secondly, Matthew 4:19 indicates His purpose of the disciples. His intention was to turn them into "fishers of men." Just as they pursued fish in the sea, He would teach them how to reach for lost humanity. Little did the disciples know that eventually they would take the baton of Christ and carry it to the corners of the known world.

In time, Jesus would teach the disciples many things. Some lessons they understood right away. Other lessons took a while to sink in.

- For examples of his lessons to the disciples, refer to Mark 9:14—32.

HIS MESSAGE

As the bread of life, the mission of Jesus was to seek and to save all those that were lost. To accomplish this, He proclaimed a very distinct message. This message was one of salvation and of freedom from sin. When He spoke about it, it gained much interest. One of those who were interested was a Pharisee named Nicodemus.

- **Read aloud:** John 3:1-7.

Though he was a Pharisee, and served on the Sanhedrin which would later condemn Jesus to death, Nicodemus was different. He wanted a change. He was hungry for something that his religion couldn't give him.

It's interesting to note that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. This shows us that the desire of Nicodemus to see Jesus was not popular with people of power. If others found out, his position would have been in danger.

Caiaphas, the Jewish High Priest, felt threatened when Jesus turned over tables in the temple. Doing thus, Jesus undermined a corrupt religious system bent on conning its way to wealth. Though he served as a politician, the heart of Nicodemus was not corrupted like the others. Rather than ridicule Jesus, he was interested in His teachings. He was curious. He was thirsty for spiritual water. He was hungry for spiritual renewal. Little did Nicodemus know that he was talking to "the bread of life."

As a Jew, with a position of power and distinction, we can conclude that Nicodemus had previously eaten wheat bread on many occasions and perhaps some fruit or nuts as a daily meal. However, his physical food did not satisfy the cravings of his heart.

When Nicodemus left Jesus on that starry night, he left satisfied and full. His soul had tasted of the bread that was sent from Heaven and he was never the same.

If we were to travel to the ancient near east, we would find a world without electricity, air-conditioning, or other modern comforts. Every pot, table, and all tools were made by hand.

The average house had an upper level, a lower level, and a courtyard (2 Kings 4:10).

- The Passover meal eaten by Jesus and his disciples was eaten in an upper room.
- On the day of Pentecost, the disciples were gathered in an upper room.

What kind of foods were ordinary to the average Hebrew of ancient times?

- The principal food in Jewish culture of Bible times was _____.

What was the difference between Barley bread and Wheat bread?

- The first act of Jesus after starting his ministry was one of _____.

How does Jesus' choice of twelve disciples represent his desire to develop even the worst of people?

What was the political position of Nicodemus and how did this influence his nighttime visit with Jesus?

As a Jew, with a position of power and distinction, we can conclude that Nicodemus had previously eaten wheat bread on many occasions and perhaps some fruit or nuts as a daily meal. However, his physical food did not satisfy the cravings of his heart. When Nicodemus left Jesus on that starry night, he left satisfied and full. His soul had tasted of the bread that was sent from Heaven and he was never the same.

— THE beginning of the end —

three

“When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the Prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.”

—Isaac Watts

THE PASSOVER REMEMBERED

In the Old Testament book of Exodus, God delivered His people from their Egyptian bondage. At this time of their history, God instituted a feast called the Passover to redeem His people from the death angel. This ceremony was to be forever memorialized and remembered annually by all Jews. God commanded the people:

And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever. Exodus 12:14.

It is no mistake that the Passover held such significance to the Jewish nation. In time, God would use the image of a spotless lamb sacrificed upon an altar as His greatest message of love and redemption.

Each year, leading up to the Passover, prime lambs were set aside and designated as “sacrificial” lambs. They could have no blemishes in their fur, deformities, or broken bones. On the day of the Passover, a sacrificial lamb was given water from a golden bowl. Then, the lamb was led up to the altar and there his right forefoot was tied to his right hindfoot. Then the left side was tied. He bleated with fright when his head was forced through an iron ring in the floor.⁶ He faced west.

Jim Bishop, in his inspiring classic, *The Day Christ Died*, makes special note of the Passover ceremony. After the lamb was tied, two priests in appropriate dress entered the holy place in the temple and one burned incense upon the altar of incense. The other trimmed the seven candlesticks. At the altar, another priest straddled the lamb, lifted its head and laid the blade of a knife against the little animal’s throat.⁷ He remained this way for a moment. Then he stroked upward hard. The lamb struggled in

silence. Another priest caught the blood in a golden bowl and sprinkled it on the altar and throughout the temple. At this point, the signal was given and all those present fell down before the Lord in an act of worship.

This ceremony was repeated every year in the temple by the priests. Soon, this old sacrifice would be used as a solemn and stirring portrait of another lamb, “slain before the foundations of the world.” (Revelation 13:8)

- **Read aloud:** 1 Corinthians 5:7.

A TRIANGLE OF POWER

As we continue walking the path to the cross, we must view the city in which the life of Christ on earth would end: Jerusalem. Because it contained the temple, it was the center of Jewish life. The temple was the center of all worship as well as being the royal palace and supreme court of the land. As a Jew, all political power rested in the Sanhedrin council – a governing body of both Sadducees and Pharisees. In the life of first century Jews, the Sanhedrin held all legislative, judicial, and executive powers.⁸

In the broader world of the ancient near east, Rome was the supreme political power. The Romans had mastered the art of ruling subject peoples and had enhanced the prestige of the Sanhedrin and gave it greater power. Though it was empowered by Rome, the Sanhedrin was still its subject. The Sanhedrin could pass a sentence of death on a criminal, or even on Gentiles who were not citizens of Rome, but such sentence had to be reviewed by the Roman Procurator and confirmed. These details would have great implications in the final days of Christ.

It was the Sanhedrin that brought the charge of blasphemy against Jesus. Interestingly, when they brought Jesus before the Roman Procurator, Pontius Pilate, they altered their original charge of blasphemy and tried to convince Pilate that Jesus defied Roman authority by taking on Himself the title, “King of the Jews.”

Along with the Romans and the Jewish Sanhedrin, a third power was King Herod. There are five different Herods mentioned in the New Testament, but the Herod in power at the time of the Crucifixion went by the name Herod Antipas. Descendants of the Old Testament *Edomites*, the Herods were all despised by the Jews for their cruelty. Herod was given certain powers by Rome to rule as King of Judea.

The mixing of these three first century powers, customs, and cultures created the world in which Jesus was sentenced to death. When Jesus gained the attention of the multitudes and uprooted the corrupt economy in the temple, he stepped into the middle of this triangle of power.

SILVER AND GOLD

At the temple, all faithful Jews paid a basic tax of half a shekel per year. The shekel of Jerusalem was a crudely rounded coin made of silver. One side proclaimed “Jerusalem the Holy,” with a pot of manna and the other side contained a lily with the words, “I will be as the dew unto Israel...”⁹

The Romans on the other hand, had their own financial system based upon a gold coin with the image of Caesar Augustus and the inscription, “Cesar Augustus, son of the god, father of his country.” To the Jews, it was a commandment to spurn the worship of false gods and idols, and they felt that Caesar’s image on Roman coins was a violation of this commandment.

⁸ Robert Rushmore, *The Arrest and Trial of Jesus* (Colorado Springs, CO: Levin House Press, 2004), 11.
⁹ *The Day Christ Died*, Bishop, 66.

It's no surprise that Judas would eventually betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. As a Jew being paid under the Jewish financial system, silver was his currency of choice.

Later in time, after the day of Pentecost, Peter and John were walking into the temple when they were stopped by a beggar asking for alms. Peter's reply began with the words, "Silver and Gold have I none..." before reaching down and healing the man (Acts 3:6). By this statement, Peter declared that he was poor in two different financial systems. His power came not from the Jews or the Romans, but from God.

Peter would later write in his epistle to the church:

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold... But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. 1 Peter 1:18-19.

THE FULFILLMENT OF ALL THINGS

In Matthew 17:1–13, an interesting event occurs. Jesus takes three of His disciples (Peter, James, and John) and goes for a time up into a mountain. On the mountain, the Bible says that Jesus was "transfigured" and He began to shine brightly as the sun. His clothes turned white as a bright light. In these moments, Moses and Elijah appeared.

Viewing the events transpiring before their eyes, the three disciples were amazed and terrified at the same time. In time, a voice beckoned from Heaven as a witness from the Spirit. It testified of the divinity of Christ.

And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. Matthew 17:6.

This event has multiple layers of significance. The greatest, perhaps, is the appearance of the two Old Testament patriarchs. Moses symbolized the Law. Elijah was a representation of the prophets.

- On that mountain, they came together in Christ.

As the Messiah, Jesus was the fulfillment of both the law and the prophets. The entire Old Testament pointed to the path He would walk on earth.

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

One Saturday shortly after His transfiguration, Jesus found Himself in Bethany at the home of Lazarus. It was there that Mary took a pound of ointment of spikenard, being very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus. Then she began to wipe His feet with her hair.

- For the full story, refer to John 12:1–11.

Mary's actions stopped the evening dinner. It was Judas who spoke up and ridiculed her over the great waste of ointment. Others did not understand the significance of the act. Jesus, on the other hand, understood that Mary was preparing Him for the cross. Her act anointed Him for His eventual death and burial. Jesus responded and honored Mary with the words,

Let her alone; against the day of my burying hath she kept this. John 12:7.

It was a Jewish custom that before burial, the dead were anointed. It was an act of honor. Many of the disciples did not know that in this event Jesus was looking ahead to Calvary.

- **Our lives are never wasted when they are spent on the Messiah.**

The next day was Sunday. Known to us as *Palm Sunday*, it was a week before the crucifixion. Over the next seven days, Jesus would be arrested, tried, and sentenced to death.

All four Gospel writers record the triumphal entry of Jesus. Leaving from Bethany, Jesus traveled to Jerusalem. It was there that He would die.

- For Old Testament prophecies concerning the triumphal entry, refer to Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9.

Many ancient nations had a custom of celebrating the victory of a king in battle with a victorious entry as he and his army returned to their home city. On Palm Sunday, Jesus was celebrated. However, His greatest victory was not behind Him. His greatest victory was yet to come.

- **Read aloud:** Matthew 21:8–12.

A MAN OF PASSION

A week later, the same multitudes that shouted “Hosanna” in praises on Palm Sunday would shout “Crucify Him!” The same Jews that honored His triumphal entry would call for His exit. Those who lay down their clothes and waved the palm leaves would later raise their fists in anger and shout insults. Jesus was well aware of this reality. Even though Jerusalem would eventually curse Him, He willingly gave Himself as a spotless lamb for their salvation.

At our worst, he gave his best.

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8.

Knowing the choice Jerusalem would make concerning His death, Jesus was grieved in His heart. Though He had come as a savior, Jerusalem rejected Him. For this reason, He wept over Jerusalem.

And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it. Luke 19:41.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. Matthew 23:37-38.

As Jesus wept over Jerusalem and prayed for its salvation, the Sanhedrin conspired to kill Him. It was the beginning of the end.

Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas. And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him. Matthew 26:3-4.

Is this not a picture of our Messiah? While we were lost and lived against His word, yet still His heart burned for us. When we sing His praises one day, and then curse Him the next, He prays for us. Knowing many of us would walk away from Him, He walked toward the cross. That was the price to pay as the great Passover lamb.

It's no mistake that in Acts 1:3, Luke referred to the cross as “His passion.” Viewing the path He took to the cross, we see His love for you and me.

“When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the Prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.” –Isaac Watts

What Old Testament feast did God establish after freeing Israel from Egyptian bondage? What did this feast call for?

How does 1 Corinthians 5:7 illustrate the New Testament meaning of the Passover?

- In New Testament times, the center of Jewish life was the _____.
- In the life of first century Jews, the _____ held all legislative, judicial, and executive powers.
- The Herodian family were descendants of the Old Testament _____.

How did the Jewish financial system and the Roman financial system differ?

The triumphal entry was how many days before the crucifixion of Christ?

After reading Luke 19:41 and Matthew 23:37–38, explain why Jesus wept over Jerusalem.

HIS death and resurrection

four

*"On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
The emblem of suff'ring and shame;
And I love that old cross where the Dearest and Best
For a world of lost sinner was slain."*

—George Bennard, 1913

THE OLD RUGGED CROSS

In 1873, George Bennard was born in Ohio as the son of a tavern owner and coal miner. He was converted at 22 through the Salvation Army, which led to his ordination and eventual travels as an itinerant minister.

In 1912, Bennard and his wife were traveling and holding revival meetings when he was heckled and mocked by several youths in Michigan. Leaving the meeting, he was troubled at their disregard for the gospel message he preached. Turning to the Scriptures, he began to reflect on Christ. According to reports, he recalled, "I seemed to have a vision... I saw the Christ and the Cross inseparable."¹⁰ It was in this moment that the first lyrics of a gospel hymn came to him.

Several months later on June 7, 1913, while visiting in the home of Rev. Leroy and Ruby Bostwick, he performed the hymn in its entirety with a guitar accompaniment. The Bostwicks were moved to tears. Soon after, during a revival, he sung the song for first time publicly as a duet at the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Pokagon, MI.¹¹

The song quickly spread and eventually came to be used in the meetings of popular revivalist, Billy Sunday. Today, "The Old Rugged Cross" remains one of the most cherished hymns of the Christian faith.

¹⁰ Eric Wyse, "The History Behind 'The Old Rugged Cross,'" 2005. <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/the-history-behind-the-old-rugged-cross-hymn-george-bennard-revival> (accessed April 24, 2016).

¹¹ Wyse, *The Old Rugged Cross*.

The reason “The Old Rugged Cross” is such a well-remembered hymn is because it describes the purpose and passion of Calvary in simple, yet majestic terms.

*“In that Old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine,
A wondrous beauty I see,
For ‘twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died,
To pardon and sanctify me.*

*So I’ll cherish the old rugged cross,
Till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross,
And exchange it some day for a crown.”*

HE GAVE IT ALL

As we continue our journey on the path to the cross, we come to the final days in the life of Christ. Jesus has already entered Jerusalem in triumphal fanfare. He has been celebrated by the masses gathered in the Holy City in observance of the Passover. He has cleansed the temple for the second time and has gained the scornful attention of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish court which is waiting for the right moment to arrest Jesus and put an end to His teachings.

On Tuesday of the passion week, we find Jesus in the temple observing a widow. She was there to pay her tax in the house of God. Of all the people there that day walking to-and-fro in anxious preparation for the feast, it was this woman that Jesus noted. There was something about her offering that captured His attention.

And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. Mark 12:41-44.

In modern terms, her offering was only a few cents. Yet, it towered above all others regardless of their superior wealth and status in society. Using this moment as an opportunity to teach His disciples, He called for their attention.

And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living. Mark 12:43-44.

In these moments, Jesus wanted His disciples to remember the widow as an example. He wanted them to remember because He would follow her example and give *His* all. On the Cross, Jesus would give His entire “living” and withhold nothing. Though they did not entirely understand the lesson of the widow, in only a few days they would come understand as they would view their master hanging between two thieves.

THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

In Scripture, we have no record of events occurring on Wednesday of the passion week. In hindsight, it seems to exist as a quiet moment before the storm. Jesus returned to Bethany and spent time with His friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

Though the Biblical record is quiet we do know that the Pharisees and Sadducees, though bitter political rivals, had united in their opposition of Jesus and were plotting His demise. Lucky for them, one of Jesus’ own disciples had agreed to betray Him.

- **Read aloud:** Luke 22:1–6.

Together with Judas, the Pharisees and Sadducees developed a plan of action. All they had to do was wait for the right time.

The day passed and Thursday came. The Passover meal was prepared and Jesus met the disciples for the ceremonial dinner. After dinner, Jesus walked to the garden of Gethsemane. The disciples came with Him.

At Gethsemane was an olive press. When translated, the word means, “place of crushing.” It was where olives were put under the pressure of a large stone wheel and crushed to produce oil. We see at Gethsemane that Jesus began feeling the weight of the world upon His shoulders. The pressure of the sins of humanity weighed upon His soul. Leaving the disciples, as He often did for prayer, He knelt and found Himself in His own “place of crushing.”

And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed... And being in agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Luke 22:41,44.

Medically, the condition from which sweat turns to blood is called haematidrosis. It occurs when fear and the agony of suffering is so magnified that a person can no longer sustain the pain. At that moment, the patient ordinarily loses consciousness. When that does not happen, the subcutaneous capillaries sometimes dilate so broadly that, when they come into contact with the sweat glands, the little capillaries burst.¹² The blood is exuded with the perspiration and, usually, this occurs over the entire body. It's no mistake that the gospel record of this event was written by Luke, a physician.

It was in the garden late into the night that Judas came with a troop of soldiers following. The disciples were found with Jesus. Many of them fled and Jesus was taken.

THE TRIAL AND CRUCIFIXION

From the garden, Jesus was first taken to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who even though he no longer held an official position was still considered a man of immense social influence.

After Annas, he was taken to Caiaphas – the high priest. Even though it was a Jewish law not to engage in the proceedings of a criminal trial while dark, they were bloodthirsty and eager to do away with Jesus while His followers were sleeping.

It was decided that Jesus would be charged on the account of blasphemy, a crime punishable by death. This was a charge that Jesus did not deny, stating that He was indeed the Messiah and “son of God” (Matthew 26:57–68). False witnesses came forward who had been paid to testify against Jesus.

It was probably between 6:00 and 7:00 in the morning when they brought Jesus, bound with chains, to the residence of the Roman governor, Pilate. Though the Sanhedrin was given certain liberties of self-rule, they were still under the authority of the Roman Empire and thus had to seek the authorization of Pilate to carry out the penalty of death.

Wishing to honor the position of Herod, who was Tetrarch, or King, of Galilee, Pilate sent Jesus to his palace. This was the same Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded (Matthew 14:10–12). He was cruel and vain, and had stolen his own brother's wife. Before Herod, Jesus held His silence. In return, Jesus was mocked and given a red cloak much like that worn by a king. It was all for theatrics, of course.

By this point, Jesus had been standing for many hours. After being taken back to Pilate the crowd

¹² *The Day Christ Died*, Bishop, 169.

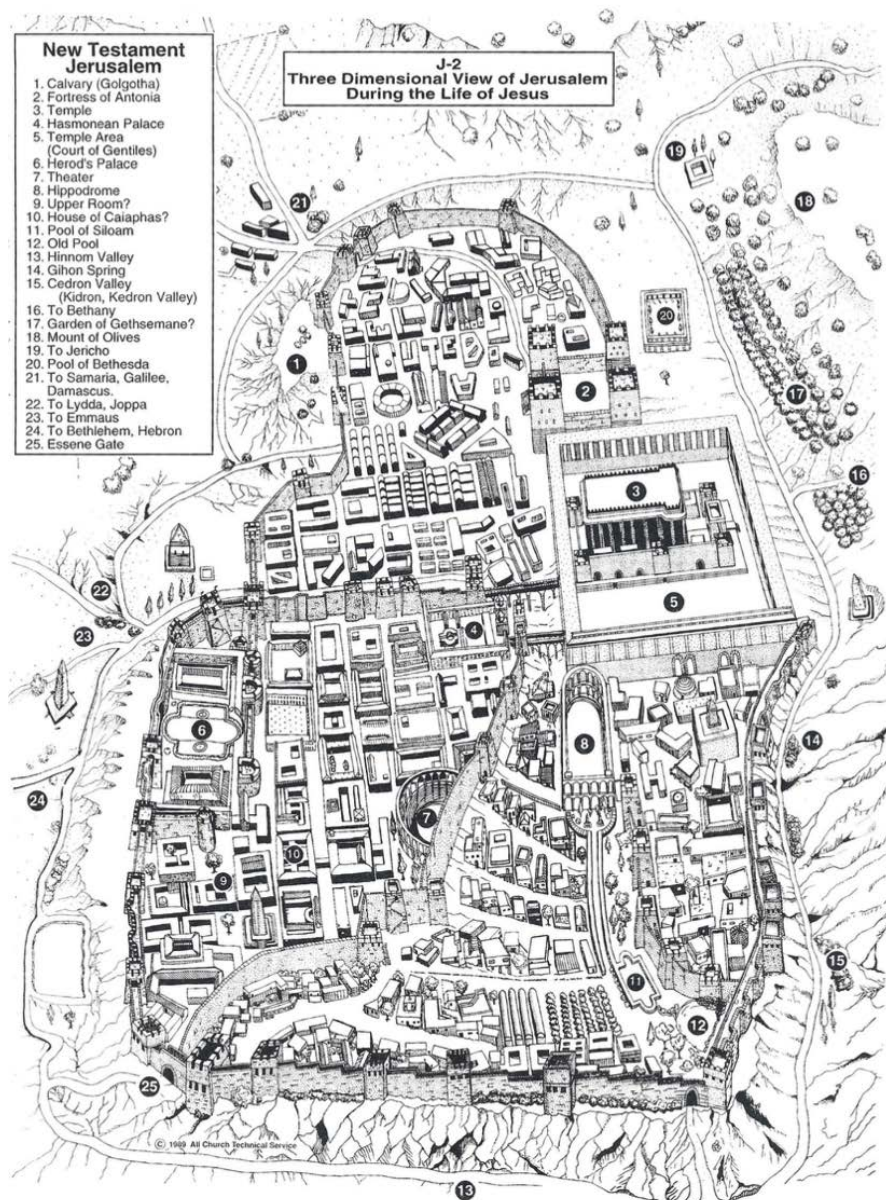
screamed for His crucifixion. Not willing to cause a riot, Pilate relented and gave the order that signaled the death of the carpenter from Nazareth.

And so Pilate, willing to content the people... delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified. Mark 15:15.

The word “scourging” describes a punishment more severe than flogging or beating. The prisoner was beaten with a whip fashioned of numerous strips of leather attached to a handle. The instrument was called a flagellum. To the leather strips were tied sharp pieces of bone and metal, which could rip and tear one’s skin to shreds.¹³

Just as a Passover lamb was tied and put under a ring at the altar, Jesus was forced to an open courtyard in the fortress of Antonia – the formal residence of Pilate. He was then pushed to His knees and His wrists were tied on the far end of a short stone pillar.

A trained soldier stood behind Jesus. He brought the flagellum all the way back and struck it forward as the strips of leather smashed against the back of the bare rib cage of Jesus. The bits of bone and chain curled around the right side of the body and left open, bloody gashes.



¹³ Arrest and Trial of Jesus, Rushmore, 68.

Crucifixion was the death of slaves and political dissidents. It was a public death meant to shame the lives of revolutionaries. In 71 B.C., after the Roman revolt under Spartacus was suppressed, 6,000 men were crucified in a single day and hung on crosses on roads between Rome and Capua.¹⁴

Most crosses of the day were around 6 feet tall. This height would accommodate most criminals because the knees were arranged in a buckled position.

AT THIS POINT, IT WAS WELL INTO FRIDAY.

The road to Golgotha that Jesus walked under extreme pain, while carrying the beam of the cross over his shoulder, was between 650–1,000 yards (2,000–3,000 feet). The first part of the march was by a narrow road, hardly more than twelve feet wide, up a slight incline, and then sharply down into the valley below. Unable to complete the entire journey, a man was pulled from the crowd and commanded to carry the cross-beam.

Once they arrived, Jesus was laid over the horizontal beam, now attached to its vertical counterpart. Each wrist was nailed to the wood. Next, His legs were bent and then His ankles were nailed, one on top of the other.

By the might of soldiers, the cross was lifted and set in place. Crucified with Jesus were two thieves.

- **Read aloud:** Luke 23:34–38.

It was there on that hill called Calvary that Jesus died. The cause of death, in Roman crucifixion, was never loss of blood. It was almost always asphyxiation.

And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost. Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, certainly this was a righteous man. Luke 23:46–7.

A RESURRECTED SAVIOR

God's plan called for the Messiah to come forth out of the grave. Death could not hold Him! God would not allow Him to see corruption (Acts 13:35).

Fearing that someone would steal the body of Jesus and claim a false resurrection, Jewish leaders had guards posted by the tomb's entrance. Their efforts to keep Christ in the tomb were to no avail. After three days, an angel of the Lord descended from Heaven, rolled back the stone from the door of the tomb, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightening, and His clothing white as snow. The keepers of the tomb shook and became "like dead men" (Matthew 28:4). Sin had been defeated. Death was conquered. The grave could not hold Him down.

And the angel answered and said... "Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen..." Matthew 28:5–6.

¹⁴ *The Day Christ Died*, Bishop, 244.

As we continue our journey on the path to the Cross, we come to the final days in the life of Christ. Jesus has already entered Jerusalem in triumphal fanfare. He has been celebrated by the masses gathered in the Holy City in observance of the Passover. He has cleansed the temple for the second time and has gained the scornful eyes of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish court which is waiting for the right moment to arrest Jesus and put an end to His teachings.

- On Tuesday of the passion week, Jesus went to the _____.

How does the lesson of the widow's mite in Mark 12 foreshadow the cross?

- In Scripture, we have no record of events occurring on _____ of the passion week.
- At Gethsemane was an _____ press. When translated, the word means, "place of crushing."
- From the garden, Jesus was first taken to _____, the father-in-law of Caiaphas.
- It was decided that Jesus would be charged on the account of _____, a crime punishable by death.

Why did the Sanhedrin have to bring their conviction of Jesus to the attention of Pilate?

- Crucifixion was the death of _____ and political dissidents.
- The road to Golgotha was between _____ yards (2,000-3,000 feet).
- The cause of death in Roman crucifixion was almost always _____.

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