

## **Introduction to the Life of Christ**

### **Purpose**

- The purpose of this Sunday School class is to provide the reader of the Gospels with a better understanding of our Lord's life and ministry. In so doing we will investigate historical, political, geographical, chronological and cultural aspects from the time period of His life and ministry here on the earth.
- We will study a consecutive record of the life and ministry of our Lord and attempt to harmonize the four Gospel accounts of the New Testament.
- We will not examine every detail of every incident or try to interpret every parable, sermon or miracle. We will however seek to include every incident it while examining some more closely than others. {The goal is to survey Christ's life not an exposition of the Gospels}

### **Overview**

- We will begin with an introduction to the study of Christ's life using Luke 1:1-4 as a basis for this introduction.
- In this introduction we will examine some *sources of knowledge* on the life of Christ. We will examine the *background information* (The world into which Jesus came). This will include the geographical setting, the historical political setting, the cultural setting, and some chronological aspects.
- We will then look at the pre-existence of Christ.
- This will be followed by the nativity and childhood of Jesus.
- After that we will look at the phases of the ministry of Jesus on the earth.
- The opening of His public ministry.
- The early Judean ministry.
- The great Galilean ministry.
- The training of the twelve.
- The Judean and Perea.
- We will then move into the events of the passion week including His death and resurrection.
- We will finish with Christ's resurrection ministry and ascension.

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## Introduction

Luke's Gospel is the only one with an introduction, so we will use his introduction as a basis to introduce the life and ministry of Christ (Read Luke 1:1-4).

-Dwight Pentecost in His book, *The Words and Words of Jesus Christ* quotes from William F. Arndt in regards to this section of Scripture and they say there are at least six facts that we can see presented in Luke's introduction.

- 1 ) The early followers of Jesus not remained silent about their Master's work, but had handed on to others the blessed knowledge which they themselves possessed. {They were obedient to the Great Commandment}
- 2) A number of people had endeavored to put down in writing what the early witnesses proclaimed.
- 3) Luke resolved to compose a work about the deeds and teaching of Jesus.
- 4) He wrote it only after the most careful and painstaking researches, having investigated everything from the very beginning.
- 5) He decided to present his material in proper order.
- 6) His work was intended to make Theophilus certain that the Christian instruction, which he had received was true.

So as we study the Life of Christ we will use Luke 1:3 as a pattern and we will attempt to investigate everything carefully from the beginning in consecutive order. I hope that we are already certain of the Christian instruction that we have had and realize it is true, as well as I hope that we have also been obedient to Christ's Great Commandment. A desired result of this study is to not only provide a background for understanding the Gospels as mentioned earlier but also that we might ourselves not remain silent about our Master's work.

The sources for our information on Christ's life:

1 ) The majority of our information comes primarily from the only Authoritative source of **God's Word** {the four Gospels}.

Why four Gospels?

- To give four different photographs of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- To emphasize His life and work by repeating it.
- To show that there is far more than enough in the Lord Jesus to attract all different types and races of men.
- To show how He fulfilled Old Testament prophecy which pictured Christ as King, Servant, Man, and God.

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### The Synoptic Problem:

- Synoptic means: seeing together.
- The Synoptic Gospels are: Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
- The synoptic problem concerns itself with why there are similarities and differences among these three Gospels. {It is born out of unbelief and those who have a problem are liberal scholars who are anti-supernaturalistic}

### Our answer to the differences:

- Each writer had a different purpose for writing.
- Each writer had a different style of writing.
- Each writer was guided by the Holy Spirit to present different view points or vantage points of Christ.

### Our answer to the similarities:

- Each writer had a direct connection with the events. -Each writer was acquainted with oral tradition.
- Each writer was guided by the Holy Spirit.

2) From Jewish sources, which help us understand the background of Jesus' life.

3) From secular literature which verifies the historicity of Jesus.

- Josephus in his Antiquities says, "Now there was about this time Jesus a wise man, if it he lawful to call him a man."
- Tacitus in relation to the persecution under Nero tells how Christians, already a great multitude derived their names from one Christos who was executed in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate.

### **The Geographical Setting**

The land of Israel is located in a strategic location in what is called the Fertile Crescent. A mountainous region is located to the north and the Arabian Desert is situated to the south. Israel is located on the West side next to the Mediterranean Sea. The Fertile Crescent is made up of the Nile and Mesopotamia River Basins. Israel is often called the Land Between / The Land Bridge / or the Point of Balance. This is because the Mediterranean Sea and the Arabian Desert forces traffic through the narrow land area of Israel. The land of Israel is split into four main longitudinal zones {running north to south}

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1. The Coastal Plain: A flat well watered plain along the coast about 8-15 miles wide. It provides the easiest and most natural route for travel from the areas of Babylon/Assyria/Syria to Egypt.
2. The Hill Country or Central Mountains: This is a range of mountains that rise over 3,000 feet in elevation in places. It runs from Galilee in the north to the Negev Highlands in the south. Jerusalem is located here at 2600 feet and receives about 25" of rain annually.
3. The Jordan Rift valley: This is a deep depression in the earth that stretches 3700 miles from Southern Turkey into Africa. It is part of what is known as the Syro-African rift. The Sea of Galilee (6690ft.) and The Dead Sea (-690 ft.) as well as the Jordan River are located in this zone.
4. The Transjordan Plateau: To the east of the Rift Valley rise the towering mountains of the Transjordan. This area has steep slopes is somewhat rugged and receives quite a bit of rain and even some snow.

### **The Historical Setting**

#### **1. The Persian Period: {450-330 BC}**

a) Issue of expatriation by Babylon and repatriation by Persia:

- Babylon had a policy of carrying off the native people of a conquered land in order to abort resistance by those people (2 Kings 12: 1-6, 24).
- Persia had an opposite policy of returning native peoples to their homeland in order to promote greater productivity and loyalty by those people.
- This resulted in the mixed race of the Samaritans (Gentiles mixed with Jews) which appear in the New Testament.

b) Historical Significance of the Persian Period:

- The Jews became a small semi-independent state under the Persian overlordship. This is the development of an internal self-government which becomes the genesis of the Sanhedrin.
- The Jewish High Priest is given an increasing amount of civil power during this period which explains the lack of civil power in the Old Testament and the great amount of civil power demonstrated in the New Testament Sanhedrin.
- Commerce develops among the Jews during this period creating a sharp distinction between the rich and poor. This also makes Jerusalem a center of commerce for Israel.

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- During this period tremendous antagonism develops between the Samaritans and the Jews for reasons explained earlier.

### **2. The Hellenistic {Greek} Period {330-166 BC}**

#### a) Historical Significance of the Period:

- The fulfillment of Daniel 8 in 332 BC when Alexander the Great conquered Persia and gained control of Israel.
- The spread of Greek culture called Hellenization which became a dominant issue in Israel especially between the Pharisees and Sadducees.
- The Greek language became the *lingua franca* (universal trade language of the Mediterranean world).

### **3. The Hasmonean Period {166-63 BC} (Period of Independence)**

a) The Ptolemies had been tolerant of the Jews, however under Seleucid control antagonism and oppression of the Jews was the norm.

- Rise of Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) and his defilement of the temple.
- These issues resulted in the Jewish revolt called the Maccabean Revolt which began this period.

#### b) Historical Significance of the Period:

- The political ground work was laid for the Herods in Israel.
- The sects of the Sadducees and Pharisees emerged over the issue of Hellenism.

### **4. The Roman Period {63 BC.....}**

#### a) Historical Survey of the Period:

- Pompey took control of Jerusalem in 63 BC.
- Rise of the line of Herod {the Idumean family befriended the Romans during Rome's struggle to control Egypt and Judea}.
- Herod the Great appointed King of Judea by Rome in 37 BC.
- Period of Consolidation: 37-25 BC
  - Herod eliminated Hasmonean rule and forced the High Priest to move to Egypt.

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- Period of Building Projects: 25-14 BC
  - Herod built a great sea harbor at Caesarea Maritima.
  - He began a rebuilding/remodeling of the Temple to gain favor with the Jews.
- Period of Family Feuds: 14-4 BC
  - late in Herod's life, after many wives and sons.
  - He feared his sons would seek his kingdom and so he kept changing his will.
  - He became a mad man slaying wives, sons, and part of the Sanhedrin.
  - He died before Passover after a lunar eclipse about March 14, 4 BC

### b) Historical Significance of the Period:

- Rome established a reasonably consistent system of law.
- The Roman government took control of piracy and thievery making travel easier and safer.
- The *Pax Romana* (world wide peace) further facilitated travel.
- The development of a solid system of roads which would eventually be used to spread the Gospel.

### **Five Political Religious Parties**

- a) The Pharisees {The Religious Conservatives}
- b) The Sadducees {The Religious Compromisers}
- c) The Essenes: {The Extreme Separatists}
- d) The Zealots {The National Jewish Party}
- e) The Herodians: {The Jewish Supporters of Herod}

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## **The Cultural Setting**

### **1. Five Favorable Factors**

- a) The world was at a state of peace.
- b) The world possessed a universal language (Greek), one of the most specific and detailed languages in existence.
- c) The Dispersion of the Jews had spread a world wide knowledge of God.
- d) The Roman Empire had developed a complex system of roads.
- e) The world had began to possess an extreme skepticism toward pagan gods.

### **2. Four Cultural Institutions:**

#### a) The Synagogue:

- Greek word means "a congregation, or assembly."
- It was a place of prayer and instruction in the Scriptures.
- Possibly originated in the time of Ezra and might be referenced to in Psalm 74:8, "*the meeting places of God.*"
- This is where the Rabbis taught from.

#### b) The Sanhedrin

- It means "a council or assembly session."
- It is first mentioned in Jewish history in the time of Antiochus the Great from 223-187 BC.
- It was an aristocratic body with the High Priest as its head.
- In the time of Christ it was the supreme civil and religious authority.
- It was made up of 71 members {24 chief priest, 24 elders, 22 scribes and the high priest} made up of both Pharisees and Sadducees.
- It lost power in 70 AD with the destruction of Jerusalem.

#### c) The Publicans: (tax collectors)

- They were collectors of Roman revenue.
- They were hated and regarded as traitors and apostates by their frequent contacts with the heathen.

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- They were considered to be tools of the oppressor and frequently overcharged for their own personal gain.

### d) The Scribes:

- They were keepers and registers of public documents.
- They studied and interpreted the Law to people.
- They were considered the highest form of teacher and were primarily Pharisees.

### **3. The Moral Status:**

- a) The nation of Israel was in a state of moral degeneration.
- b) The Roman Empire had about 6,000,000 slaves.
- c) Divorce and immorality were the rule.
- d) Thousands of lives were sacrificed in the arena for entertainment.
- e) There was the existence of a Messianic Hope however their view of the Messiah was confused and misunderstood.

### **Chronological Aspects**

These will be primarily dealt with as we move through Christ's life. As we survey through His life we will deal with how the following dates can be determined.

1. Christ's Birth: Winter 5-4 BC
2. Herod's Death: Spring 4 BC
3. The Beginning of John the Baptist's Ministry (Luke 3:1): 29 AD
4. The Beginning of Christ's Ministry (Luke 3:23): 29 AD
5. First Passover of Christ's Ministry (John 2:13): April 7, 30 AD
6. Second Passover of Christ's Ministry (necessitated by John 5:1): April 25, 31 AD
7. Third Passover of Christ's Ministry (John 6:4): April 13/14, 32 AD
8. Christ at Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:2, 10): September 10-17 S)- 17, 32 AD
9. Christ at Feast of Dedication (John 10:22-39): December 18, 32 AD
10. Christ's Passion Week: March 27<sup>th</sup>-April 5<sup>th</sup>, 33 AD
11. Christ's Crucifixion: April 3, 33 AD {Friday}

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12. Christ's Resurrection: April 5, 33 AD {Sunday}

13. Christ's Ascension: May 14, 33 AD

### **Intertestamental Period**

There are approximately 400 years, which take place between the days of Nehemiah and Malachi and the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem. This is a great yawning chasm of silence as far as Scripture is concerned. Nevertheless, this period was a thrilling time when momentous and world-shaking events were transpiring. A brief understanding is at least essential to a right appreciation of the New Testament.

World history made rapid strokes in this interval. The internal condition of Judah experienced a radical transformation. A new culture, different institutions, and unfamiliar organizations arose in this period, which appear in the New Testament.

The Old Testament closed with the Medo-Persian Empire being the dominant power. Also, Egypt was still a power to be reckoned with in world politics. During the interval between the Testaments both faded from the scene as outstanding nations. World power shifted from the east to the west, from the Orient to the Occident, from Asia to Europe, and from Medo-Persia to Greece. When the New Testament opens, a new power, Rome, is the world ruler. A consideration of some important dates will give a rapid succession of major events, which mark the transition.

- 480 BC Xerxes, the Persian, was victorious against the Greeks at Thermopylae, but he was defeated at the battle of Salamis. This was the last bid of the East for world dominion.
- 333 BC Alexander the Great led the united Greek forces to victory over the Persians at Issus.
- 332 BC Alexander the Great visited Jerusalem. He was shown the prophecy of Daniel, which spoke of him; therefore he spared Jerusalem.
- 323 BC Alexander died, and the world empire of both east and west was divided among his four generals.
- 320 BC Judea was annexed to Egypt by Ptolemy Soter.
- 312 BC Selucius founded the kingdom of the Selucidae. Judea became the battleground between Syria and Egypt as a buffer state.
- 203 BC Antiochus the Great took Jerusalem, and Judea passed under the influence of Syria.
- 170 BC Antiochus Epiphanes took Jerusalem and defiled the temple, He had been mentioned in Daniel as the little horn (Dan. 8:9). He has been called the "Nero of Jewish history."
- 166 BC Mattathias, the priest of Judea, raised a revolt against Syria. This is the beginning of the Maccabean period. The Jews have never suffered more than during this era, and never

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were they more heroic than in this interval. Judas Macabaeus "the hammer" was the leader who organized the revolt.

- 63 BC Pompey, the Roman, took Jerusalem, and this people passed under the rulership of a new world-power, where they were at the time of the birth of Jesus.
- 40 BC Roman Senate appointed Herod to be King of Judea.
- 37 BC Herod took Jerusalem and slew Antigonus, the last of the Maccabean king-priests.
- 31 BC Caesar Augustus became emperor of Rome.
- 19 BC The rebuilding of the Herodian temple was begun.
- 5/4 BC Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

The experiences of the nation of Judea during the Inter-Testament period affected its internal life. In fact, a radical change took place. They turned from idolatry, after the Babylonian captivity, to a frantic striving for legal holiness. The law became an idol to them. The classic Hebrew gave way to the Aramaic in their everyday speech, but the Hebrew was retained for their synagogues. The synagogue, which seemed to have come in right after the captivity, became the center of their life in Judea and also everywhere they went into the world. Many parties appeared among them.

### **Five New Parties**

#### **Pharisees**

There were three religious parties or sects among the Jews. None of the parties were very large. There were about six thousand Pharisees in the time of Christ. They would be classed as a conservative ritualist party and were more popular with the people because of their antiforeign attitude and high regard for the Scriptures. In the Sanhedrin, they held a majority. They held the oral law with its many interpretations and traditions to be just as binding as the Old Testament. They went to great lengths to keep themselves separated from all that they considered unclean, and to perform all religious duties. Their great besetting sin was hypocrisy.

The Pharisees kept the Messianic hope alive, although their concept of the Messiah was perverted. They believed in a future state and the resurrection of the dead. They considered the common people as cursed because they did not know the law (Luke 18:9; John 7:49).

#### **Sadducees**

The Sadducees were the priestly party and were smaller in number than the Pharisees. They were mostly from wealthy influential priestly families. They were the rationalists of the day, only believing what they thought was reasonable. They denied the authority of the oral law, the resurrection, future punishment and rewards. It is a paradox that these very same unbelieving priests were the ones who ministered in the temple and offered the sacrifices, yet as a class they didn't personally believe in the value or necessity of those sacrifices. It was their "business" that the Lord interfered with when He cleansed the temple. But Christ died for them too and "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

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### **Essenes**

The New Testament does not mention the Essenes. They withdrew from ordinary society and lived near the Dead Sea. They practiced a monastic type of life. By adhering to an ascetic discipline and the simple life, they sought communion with God and purity of life. Because of the recent discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, some of which at least were deposited by them, they have become the object of recent study of archaeologists.

### **Zealots**

The Zealots were the national Jewish party which arose after the Romans took over Palestine in 63 BC. They tried to arouse the people to fight for their deliverance. They were responsible for several minor clashes with Rome and were active in the final clash in AD 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed. In many cases they had degenerated into outlaw bands that terrorized the land. Barabbas was probably a Zealot. He was in prison for insurrection (Mark 15:7). The two thieves (correctly translated "robbers") that were crucified with Jesus may also have been Zealots (Matt. 27:44). One of Jesus' disciples was a Zealot, "Simon the Canaanite" (Matt. 10:4). "Canaanite" should be translated "Cananaean." This is the Aramaic name for Zealot.

### **Herodians**

The Herodians were a small political party that was trying to further the power of the Herod family. Judea and Samaria had been taken from Herod's control and were governed by a Roman procurator. The Herodians and Pharisees were bitter enemies, but they did conspire together to try to kill Jesus. Pilate and Herod Antipas were enemies until after the trials and death of Jesus (Luke 23:12).

### **The Herod Family**

#### **Herod the Great**

Herod the Great ruled Palestine from 37 to 4 B.C. He captured Jerusalem in 37 BC and was crowned king by Augustus Caesar through Mark Anthony's influence. He started rebuilding the temple in 20 BC. He was a harsh and bloodthirsty old man who murdered his favorite wife and three of his sons. It was completely in character for him to order the murder of the Bethlehem babies.

#### **Herod Archelaus**

Herod Archelaus, a son of Herod the Great, was ruling in Judaea and Samaria and Idumaea when Joseph and Mary returned from Egypt with Jesus (Matt. 2:22). His kingdom was taken away from him and the Romans appointed a series of governors of which Pontius Pilate was the one who ruled during Christ's ministry.

#### **Herod Philip I**

Herod Philip I, a son of Herod the Great, was the first husband of Herodias and the father of Salome. He never ruled.

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### **Herod Philip II**

Herod Philip II, a son of Herod the Great, ruled from 4 BC until AD 34. He was the Tetrarch of Iturea. He was the best ruler among the Herod family and, relatively speaking, was fair and just. He married Salome, the dancer, his brother's daughter.

### **Herod Antipas**

Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great and a brother of Archelaus, ruled as the Tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39. He was mean and crafty. Jesus once called him a fox. He and Pilate were enemies until after the trial of Jesus.

### **Herodias**

Herodias was the daughter of Aristobulus, granddaughter of Herod the Great, and sister of Herod Agrippa I. She was first married to Herod Philip I and left him to live with Herod Antipas.

### **Salome**

Salome was the daughter of Herodias and Herod Philip I. At the banquet that Herod Antipas gave she danced before him. It was to her that he promised he would give up to half of his kingdom. Her mother, Herodias, persuaded her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. She later married Herod Philip II.

### **Herod Agrippa I**

Herod Agrippa I ruled from AD 37 to 44. He was the brother of Herodias and a grandson of Herod the Great. He is the one in the book of Acts that beheaded the Apostle James and imprisoned Peter.

### **Herod Agrippa II**

Herod Agrippa II, a great-grandson of Herod the Great, ruled from A.D. 52 to 70. He was king of part of Judea, and Bernice and Drusilla were his sisters. Paul made his defense before him.

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**A COMPARISON OF THE FOUR GOSPELS**

	<b>MATTHEW</b>	<b>MARK</b>	<b>LUKE</b>	<b>JOHN</b>
<b>TO WHOM WRITTEN:</b>	Jews	Romans	Greeks	World
<b>PURPOSE:</b>	Explain the kingdom	Impress the power of Gospel	Set in historical order	Emphasize the plan of salvation
<b>SPECIAL EMPHASIS:</b>	Discourses	Miracles	Parables	Personal interviews
<b>HOW SAVIOR SEEN:</b>	Promised Savior	Powerful Savior	Perfect Savior	Personal Savior
<b>KEY TEXT:</b>	2:2	10:45	19:10	20:30-31
<b>DATE OF WRITING:</b>	50-60 AD	55-64 AD	60-63 AD	85-95 AD
<b>PLACE OF WRITING</b>	Judea	Rome	Caesarea	Ephesus
<b>THEME:</b>	Jesus is the rejected Messiah of the Jews	Jesus is the powerful Servant of God	Jesus is the ideal Son of Man	Jesus is the eternal Son of God