

Part 1: The Life of Jesus

Introduction: At Just the Right Time

The prophets of God were silent for 400 years. The remnant of God's people were now called Jews. They were living under the cruel occupation of a powerful country called Rome. The consequences of sin and rebellion weighed heavy on the Jewish people. Meanwhile, God had been preparing for the redemption of man from sin. Before His arrival on Earth, Jesus was with the Father in Heaven as part of the eternal Godhead. He was "the Word that became flesh."¹ That means He left the perfection of Heaven to live among men.



The Christ is Born!

God's prophecy included where the Savior would be born!

*But you, O Bethlehem ... from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.*²



A young Jewish woman named Mary was betrothed to a Jew named Joseph.

One night as she slept, an angel from God came. He said that by the Spirit of the Lord, she would become miraculously pregnant even though she was a virgin.³ This Child was the long awaited Messiah and Redeemer. He was to be named Jesus. Even though there were many struggles, she accepted God's will to become the mother of the Messiah. Mary gave birth to Jesus in Bethlehem. Jesus fulfilled the birth prophecy from hundreds of years prior!

Jesus Begins His Ministry

The Bible books that tell about Jesus' life are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They are called *the Gospels*. Gospel means *good news* and presents the life, work, and sacrifice of Jesus as the good news for everyone to hear. Jesus was thirty years old when he began His gospel ministry. He started by being baptized.⁴

¹ John 1:14,14; See also Philippians 2

² Micah 5:2 ESV

³ See *Christian Basics: Why does the Virgin Birth Matter?*

⁴ Luke 3:22; *Christian Basics: Why Does the Baptism of Jesus Matter?*

Jesus gathered disciples to Him from different backgrounds. Some were poor fishermen. Others were political, and one was a tax collector. Twelve of these men became Jesus' apostles.⁵ They were trained to help the church after Jesus' ministry was finished. There were also women of great faith who provided for the financial needs of Jesus and the disciples.⁶



The Great Teacher

The Gospels are full of the teachings of Jesus. We can see the greatest sermon ever preached, the Sermon on the Mount.⁷ Jesus used opportunities like this to teach people about His mission and the purpose for their lives. He wanted everyone to know the Way that God planned to redeem mankind. Sometimes, He taught only a few people. Other times He taught thousands. As His ministry grew in popularity, people came from near and far to see Jesus. Jesus taught by giving common examples. Since many were farmers and country folk, he often taught lessons that used farming and fishing as the example.⁸



Many of the religious leaders of the Jews began to be jealous of Jesus' popularity. They did not like that Jesus was not properly schooled like they were and yet He had a perfect understanding of the Law of Moses. They did not like that He was more popular than they were with the common people. They also did not like that Jesus preached that He came from Heaven and was equal with God the Father. They thought Jesus was a false teacher, and they began to plot how to get rid of Him.

The Great Miracle Worker

Jesus performed miracles to show that He had power and authority from Heaven.⁹ He healed the sick. He gave blind people their sight. He gave the deaf the ability to hear. He brought dead people back to life! All of these miracles were intended to show people that He had the authority of God. The Jewish religious leaders were also envious of Jesus' miracles. They ignored the obvious power of God and tried to say that it was the devil who gave Jesus special powers. They blinded themselves to the truth: Jesus' miraculous power demonstrated God's superior power over the devil!



⁵ John 1:35-51, Matthew 4:18-22, 9:9-13, 10:1-4

⁶ Luke 8:1-3

⁷ Matthew 5-7

⁸ Matthew 13:1-23

⁹ Examples of Miracles: Mathew 9, Mark 7, John 9, 11

A Life Without Sin

The life of Jesus is remarkable because He never sinned!¹⁰ He followed the Law of Moses perfectly and never committed an act of disobedience! The devil even visited Jesus to personally tempt Him to sin but was unable to sway Jesus' goodness. Because He was tempted yet did not sin, Jesus can sympathize with us when we struggle with temptation.

The sinless life of Jesus was necessary because of God's pattern of sacrifice. In the Law of Moses, priests offered sacrifices to God using animals *without blemish*. These pure and spotless animals were intended to show that God would forgive the sins of men when an innocent sacrifice was offered in its place. The animals foreshadowed Jesus, the sinless and perfect sacrifice.

Conspiracy

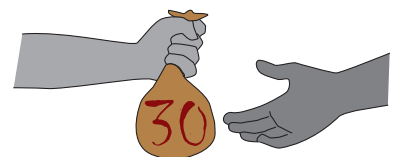
After three years of preaching, Jesus came into Jerusalem one last time. He entered the temple, the holy place of worship for the Jews. Unfortunately, many people had started doing business in the temple. They were exchanging money and selling merchandise there. Jesus was angry that the people were not honoring God. He began turning over the tables of money and ran out the money changers. He rebuked the religious leaders for preaching but not obeying God's commands.¹¹

This rebuke made the Jewish leaders even angrier. Jesus' words made them look bad. They wanted to kill Him, but they could not find an opportunity. They were afraid of the people who seemed to love Jesus. They began to form a plan to get rid of this man who had caused them so much trouble.

Betrayal

One of Jesus' disciples was named Judas Iscariot. The Jewish leaders were able to convince Judas to betray Jesus. The Bible gives little detail about his motive, but we can know this: Judas was not tricked. While he was influenced by the devil, Judas *chose* to betray Jesus. He went to the religious leaders in secret. He asked how much they would be willing to pay if he handed Jesus over to them. They counted out thirty pieces of silver and gave it to Judas. He left and waited for an opportunity to betray Jesus. Hundreds of years before this happened, God inspired a man named Zechariah to make a prophecy about the betrayal:

So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the Potter." – that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter.¹²



¹⁰ See: Matthew 4:1-11, 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Peter 2:22, Hebrews 4:15; 7-10; *Christian Basics: Why Does A Sinless Savior Matter?*

¹¹ Matthew 23; Luke 19:45-48

¹² Zechariah 11:12-13

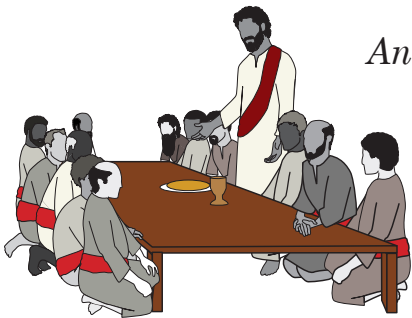
Part 2: One Last Night, One Dark Day

Introduction: Plans

Many plans had been made that would be accomplished soon. Judas had plans to betray Jesus to the religious leaders. They had plans to condemn Jesus to death. The devil had a plan to destroy the Son of God. Even the greatest plan of all, God's plan to redeem man from sin, was soon to be accomplished. All that was left for God's plan to be fulfilled was one last night and one dark day.¹

The Communion

On the night Jesus was betrayed, He brought His disciples into an upper room. There they had a meal together. After the meal, Jesus did something very special: He instituted the Communion. (It is also called *the Lord's Supper*.) This is a very special ceremony that Christians still keep to this day.



*And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."*²

The bread and the cup of fruit of the vine (grape juice) did not magically turn into Jesus' *body* and *blood of the new covenant*. (Nor does it today.) They are symbolic examples. Christians use these symbols every Sunday to honor Jesus' sacrifice.³

Jesus told Judas that He knew of his betrayal. Even so, Judas did not repent. Instead, Judas left to find the religious leaders. Meanwhile, Jesus was trying to tell His followers that He would die soon. He knew God's plan involved His sacrifice on the cross. He also said that all the disciples would forsake Him and run away.

A Garden Prayer

Jesus led His disciples to a mountainside olive grove to pray. All of His disciples, even Judas, knew of this location. With His disciples nearby, Jesus knelt in prayer. Jesus was in great sorrow and deeply distressed. His prayer was a window into His heart:

*"O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."*⁴

Jesus' prayer for the cup to pass was a reference to God's wrath. Since the time when sin first came into the world, the wrath and judgment of God. He knew that

¹ Scriptures of Jesus last night and final day are found in Matthew 26:28, Mark 14:16, Luke 22:24, and John 18:19

² Matthew 26:26-29 (See also Mark 14:22-26 & Luke 22:14-23

³ Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; See *Christian Basics: All About the Communion*

⁴ Matthew 26:39

the death of an innocent person was necessary in order to atone for the sins of the guilty. Since Jesus lived a perfect life without sin, He was the only one who could die in order to save man from sin.

Jesus Is Arrested

As Jesus was praying, the sound of soldiers' feet filled the garden. Jesus' disciples were surprised to see a large mob around them. In the middle of this group of troublemakers was Judas Iscariot. He told the mob as they arrived to look for the one that he kissed. This would be a sign for them to see who to arrest.

Judas stepped forward. He kissed Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi." Jesus replied, "Friend, do what you came for." With the sign witnessed by the soldiers, they stepped forward to arrest Jesus. At this point, all of Jesus' disciples deserted Him and ran away. It was just as He had said.

A Dishonest Trial

Jesus was brought before the Jewish religious council. They tried many ways to prove that Jesus was guilty of something that deserved death. No one could find anything. Eventually, after many false witnesses, the high priest asked for Jesus to answer if He was the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus answered:



*"It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."*⁵

The high priest accused Jesus of blasphemy, which is insulting God. They thought Jesus insulted God by saying He and the Father are equals. What they refused to see was that Jesus was (and is) a part of the Godhead.⁶ He had come from heaven and from God the Father! The council agreed that Jesus was worthy of death. They blindfolded Him, spat in His face, and struck Him with the palms of their hands. They mocked Him and asked for Him to prophesy who had hit Him.

An Angry Mob and the Roman Governor

The Jewish leaders took Jesus to the Roman Governor's courtyard. They needed permission from Pontius Pilate (the governor) to execute Jesus. When Judas saw Jesus was condemned, his betrayal made him feel guilty. He ran to the temple and begged that they take back the money.

⁵ Matthew 26:64

⁶ Philippians 2:6-10, Colossians 2:9; *See Christian Basics: The Godhead (Parts 1-3)*

He said, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood."⁷ When they refused to accept it, he threw the money in the temple. Then Judas left and hanged himself. Perhaps he felt that the consequences of his sins were too much to bear.

Pilate the Governor took Jesus inside, and they had a private conversation. From this, Pilate began to see that Jesus was innocent and that the religious leaders were envious of Him. He tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish mob was angry and called for His death. Pilate had Jesus scourged with a whip. The whip most likely had metal,



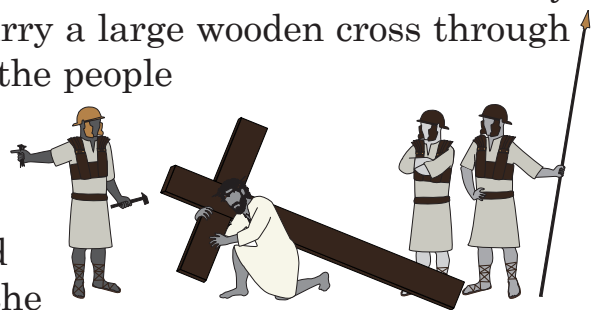
bone, or glass in its tips so that the whip would cut into the flesh. After His body was ripped open by the scourging, the Roman soldiers put a crown of thorns on Jesus' head. They put a purple robe on His bloody back and put a reed in his hand. Then, they mocked Him by bowing down and saying, "Hail, King of the Jews." Then, they took the reed out of His hands and hit Him with it. Eventually, they led the bloody and broken Man back to Pilate.

Pilate took Jesus to the front of the large Jewish mob. He called out, "Behold the Man." He called for Jesus to be released. Pilate believed Jesus was innocent. (Perhaps he had hoped that scourging Jesus would make the people feel pity.) The religious leaders were ready. When Pilate asked what he should do with Jesus, they had told the mob what to say. "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Pilate was shocked. "Why?" he shouted, "What crime has He committed?" The mob only shouted louder, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!"

A Long Walk

Only a week earlier, the city had welcomed Jesus. They shouted with joy that He had come. Now they called for His death. They called for His blood to be on them and their children. Jesus was probably overcome with grief to see these people calling for His death when so little time had passed since they celebrated His life.

Pilate gave in to the religious leaders' request. He sentenced Jesus to death by crucifixion. The Roman soldiers forced Jesus to carry a large wooden cross through the streets of Jerusalem. As Jesus slowly walked, the people of the city came out to see the horror. Blood fell to the streets as He struggled through. They slowly walked towards a hill called *Golgotha*. This word means *the place of the skull*. Even the hill looked like death. May the raw emotion of this part of the gospel narrative shed a new sense of appreciation on God's love for mankind:



"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."—John 3:16

⁷ See *Christian Basics: "I'm Sorry, God." Remorse and Repentance*