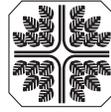


JANUARY 1



BEGINNINGS OF EARLY MANKIND

(Creation to ca. 2100 B.C.)

The Beginning



Is it possible to imagine a time when nothing existed? Take away the brilliance of the sun, for example, and the moon and stars at night. What would life be like without them? Take away the clouds and sky and rivers and oceans. Imagine the earth without any human beings, animals, fish, birds, grass, trees, or plants of any kind. What would it be like with the earth completely bare? Indeed, what would it be like if there were no earth at all, no universe—nothing? Has the universe existed forever? Was there never a time when it had a beginning? Surely it must have had a beginning. But when would that have been? How would it all have happened? What made it happen? For what purpose, if any, did it happen? Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here?

Since recorded history began, men and women of every generation, culture, and place have searched for the answers to those questions. Some say it all happened by chance, without any reason or purpose whatever. But given what appears to be intelligent design and order throughout the universe, an origin by chance seems hard to accept. And life without meaning seems clearly contrary to the very mind which searches for meaning. So what are the answers? Where did I come from, and why am I here? How did it all begin?

ACCOUNT OF CREATION. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.^a The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. Gen. 1:1,2

Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day" and the darkness "night." Gen. 1:3-5

And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day.

Then God said, "Let there be a space between the waters, to separate the waters of the heavens from the waters of the earth." And that is what Gen. 1:6-8

^aOr *In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, . . . Or When God began to create the heavens and the earth, . . .*

happened. God made this space to separate the waters of the earth from the waters of the heavens. God called the space “sky.”

And evening passed and morning came, marking the second day.

Gen.
1:9-13

Then God said, “Let the waters beneath the sky flow together into one place, so dry ground may appear.” And that is what happened. God called the dry ground “land” and the waters “seas.” And God saw that it was good. Then God said, “Let the land sprout with vegetation—every sort of seed-bearing plant, and trees that grow seed-bearing fruit. These seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came.” And that is what happened. The land produced vegetation—all sorts of seed-bearing plants, and trees with seed-bearing fruit. Their seeds produced plants and trees of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

And evening passed and morning came, marking the third day.

Gen.
1:14-19

Then God said, “Let lights appear in the sky to separate the day from the night. Let them be signs to mark the seasons, days, and years. Let these lights in the sky shine down on the earth.” And that is what happened. God made two great lights—the larger one to govern the day, and the smaller one to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set these lights in the sky to light the earth, to govern the day and night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

And evening passed and morning came, marking the fourth day.

Gen.
1:20-23

Then God said, “Let the waters swarm with fish and other life. Let the skies be filled with birds of every kind.” So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that scurries and swarms in the water, and every sort of bird—each producing offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply. Let the fish fill the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth.”

And evening passed and morning came, marking the fifth day.

Gen.
1:24,25

Then God said, “Let the earth produce every sort of animal, each producing offspring of the same kind—livestock, small animals that scurry along the ground, and wild animals.” And that is what happened. God made all sorts of wild animals, livestock, and small animals, each able to produce offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

Gen.
1:26-30

Then God said, “Let us make human beings^a in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth,^b and the small animals that scurry along the ground.”

So God created human beings^c in his own image.

In the image of God he created them;

male and female he created them.

^aOr *man*; Hebrew reads *adam*.

^bAs in Syriac version; Hebrew reads *all the earth*.

^cOr *the man*; Hebrew reads *ha-adam*.

From the tribe of Asher they received the following towns with their pasturelands: Mishal, Abdon, Helkath, and Rehob—four towns.

From the tribe of Naphtali they received the following towns with their pasturelands: Kedesh in Galilee (a city of refuge for those who accidentally killed someone), Hammoth-dor, and Kartan—three towns. So in all, thirteen towns with their pasturelands were allotted to the clan of Gershon.

Josh.
21:34-40

MERARITES. The rest of the Levites—the Merari clan—were given the following towns with their pasturelands from the tribe of Zebulun: Jokneam, Kartah, Dimnah, and Nahalal—four towns.

From the tribe of Reuben they received the following towns with their pasturelands: Bezer, Jahaz,^a Kedemoth, and Mephaath—four towns.

From the tribe of Gad they received the following towns with their pasturelands: Ramoth in Gilead (a city of refuge for those who accidentally killed someone), Mahanaim, Heshbon, and Jazer—four towns. So in all, twelve towns were allotted to the clan of Merari.

Josh.
21:41,42

TOTAL LEVITE CITIES. The total number of towns and pasturelands within Israelite territory given to the Levites came to forty-eight. Every one of these towns had pasturelands surrounding it.

Josh.
21:43-45

PROMISE FULFILLED. So the LORD gave to Israel all the land he had sworn to give their ancestors, and they took possession of it and settled there. And the LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had solemnly promised their ancestors. None of their enemies could stand against them, for the LORD helped them conquer all their enemies. Not a single one of all the good promises the LORD had given to the family of Israel was left unfulfilled; everything he had spoken came true.

Joshua's Farewell Addresses



The initial phase of the conquest now complete, Joshua turns his thoughts to the ongoing need for Israel's spiritual commitment to God.

In a manner reminiscent of Moses, Joshua addresses his people on three separate occasions. The first is a farewell to the soldiers of the eastern tribes who have joined the western tribes in taking Canaan. Joshua blesses them and exhorts them to remain faithful to God and his laws. Great concern arises when the rest of Israel learns that the eastern tribes have built an altar on their way back across the Jordan, but all ends well when it is learned that no rebellion was intended, as some had feared.

Joshua's second address, to the western tribes, is a review of God's blessings and a stern warning against involvement with pagan people and their idolatry.

The last address calls the people to renew their covenant with God, as each generation must do for itself. The people vow to be faithful, but Joshua knows that it is easier said than done. In order to encourage their faithfulness, Joshua constructs a memorial of this third covenant between Israel and God.

^aHebrew *Jahzah*, a variant spelling of Jahaz.

ADDRESS TO EASTERN TRIBES. Then Joshua called together the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. He told them, "You have done as Moses, the servant of the LORD, commanded you, and you have obeyed every order I have given you. During all this time you have not deserted the other tribes. You have been careful to obey the commands of the LORD your God right up to the present day. And now the LORD your God has given the other tribes rest, as he promised them. So go back home to the land that Moses, the servant of the LORD, gave you as your possession on the east side of the Jordan River. But be very careful to obey all the commands and the instructions that Moses gave to you. Love the LORD your God, walk in all his ways, obey his commands, hold firmly to him, and serve him with all your heart and all your soul." So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went home.

Josh.
22:1-6

TRIBES RETURN TO GILEAD. Moses had given the land of Bashan, east of the Jordan River, to the half-tribe of Manasseh. (The other half of the tribe was given land west of the Jordan.) As Joshua sent them away and blessed them, he said to them, "Go back to your homes with the great wealth you have taken from your enemies—the vast herds of livestock, the silver, gold, bronze, and iron, and the large supply of clothing. Share the plunder with your relatives."

Josh.
22:7-9
Gilead

So the men of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh left the rest of Israel at Shiloh in the land of Canaan. They started the journey back to their own land of Gilead, the territory that belonged to them according to the LORD's command through Moses.

TRIBES BUILD ALTAR. But while they were still in Canaan, and when they came to a place called Geliloth^a near the Jordan River, the men of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh stopped to build a large and imposing altar.

Josh.
22:10-12

The rest of Israel heard that the people of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh had built an altar at Geliloth at the edge of the land of Canaan, on the west side of the Jordan River. So the whole community of Israel gathered at Shiloh and prepared to go to war against them.

WESTERN TRIBES ANGERED. First, however, they sent a delegation led by Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, to talk with the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. In this delegation were ten leaders of Israel, one from each of the ten tribes, and each the head of his family within the clans of Israel.

Josh.
22:13-20

When they arrived in the land of Gilead, they said to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, "The whole community of the LORD demands to know why you are betraying the God of Israel. How could you turn away from the LORD and build an altar for yourselves in rebellion against him? Was our sin at Peor not enough? To this day we are not fully cleansed of it, even after the plague that struck the entire community of the LORD. And yet today you are turning away from following the LORD. If you rebel against the LORD today, he will be angry with all of us tomorrow.

"If you need the altar because the land you possess is defiled, then join us in the LORD's land, where the Tabernacle of the LORD is situated, and

^aOr to the circle of stones; similarly in 22:11.

God on their shoulders with its carrying poles, just as the LORD had instructed Moses.

David also ordered the Levite leaders to appoint a choir of Levites who were singers and musicians to sing joyful songs to the accompaniment of harps, lyres, and cymbals.

1 Chron.
15:17–24

So the Levites appointed Heman son of Joel along with his fellow Levites: Asaph son of Berekiah, and Ethan son of Kushaiah from the clan of Merari. The following men were chosen as their assistants: Zechariah, Jaaziel,^a Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, and the gatekeepers—Obed-edom and Jeiel.

The musicians Heman, Asaph, and Ethan were chosen to sound the bronze cymbals. Zechariah, Aziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Maaseiah, and Benaiah were chosen to play the harps.^b Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed-edom, Jeiel, and Azariah were chosen to play the lyres.^c Kenaniah, the head Levite, was chosen as the choir leader because of his skill.

Berekiah and Elkanah were chosen to guard^d the Ark. Shebaniah, Joshaphat, Nethanel, Amasai, Zechariah, Benaiah, and Eliezer—all of whom were priests—were chosen to blow the trumpets as they marched in front of the Ark of God. Obed-edom and Jehiah were chosen to guard the Ark.

2 Sam.
6:12b–15
1 Chron.
15:25–28

TRIUMPHANT RETURN OF ARK. Then David and the elders of Israel and the generals of the army^e went to the house of Obed-edom to bring the Ark of the LORD's Covenant up to Jerusalem with a great celebration. And because God was clearly helping the Levites as they carried the Ark of the LORD's Covenant, they sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams.

David was dressed in a robe of fine linen, as were all the Levites who carried the Ark, and also the singers, and Kenaniah the choir leader. David was also wearing a priestly garment.^f So all Israel brought up the Ark of the LORD's Covenant with shouts of joy, the blowing of rams' horns and trumpets, the crashing of cymbals, and loud playing on harps and lyres.

2 Sam. 6:16
1 Chron.
15:29

MICHAL DESPISES DAVID. But as the Ark of the LORD's Covenant entered the City of David, Michal, the daughter of Saul, looked down from her window. When she saw King David skipping about and laughing with joy, she was filled with contempt for him.

2 Sam.
6:17–19
1 Chron.
16:1–3

CELEBRATION IN JERUSALEM. They brought the Ark of God and placed it inside the special tent David had prepared for it. And they presented burnt offerings and peace offerings to God. When he had finished his sacrifices, David blessed the people in the name of the LORD. Then he gave to every man and woman in all Israel a loaf of bread, a cake of dates,^g and a cake of raisins.

^aAs in several Hebrew manuscripts and Greek version (see also parallel lists in 15:20; 16:5); Masoretic Text reads *Zechariah ben Jaaziel*. ^bHebrew adds *according to Alamothe*, which is probably a musical term. The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

^cHebrew adds *according to the Sheminith*, which is probably a musical term. The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain. ^dHebrew *chosen as gatekeepers for*; also in 15:24.

^eHebrew *the commanders of thousands*. ^fHebrew *a linen ephod*. ^gOr *a portion of meat*. The meaning of the Hebrew is uncertain.

LEVITES APPOINTED MINISTERS. David appointed the following Levites to lead the people in worship before the Ark of the LORD—to invoke his blessings, to give thanks, and to praise the LORD, the God of Israel. Asaph, the leader of this group, sounded the cymbals. Second to him was Zechariah, followed by Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-edom, and Jeiel. They played the harps and lyres. The priests, Benaiah and Jahaziel, played the trumpets regularly before the Ark of God’s Covenant.

1 Chron.
16:4–6

SONGS OF PRAISE. ^{Ch}On that day David gave to Asaph and his fellow Levites this song of thanksgiving to the LORD:

1 Chron.
16:7–36
Psa. 105
Psa. 96

Give thanks to the LORD and proclaim his greatness.

Let the whole world know what he has done.

Sing to him; yes, sing his praises.

Tell everyone about his wonderful deeds.

Exult in his holy name;

rejoice, you who worship the LORD.

Search for the LORD and for his strength;

continually seek him.

Remember the wonders he has performed,

his miracles, and the rulings he has given,

you children of his servant Israel,

you descendants of Jacob, his chosen ones.

He is the LORD our God.

His justice is seen throughout the land.

Remember his covenant forever—

the commitment he made to a thousand generations.

This is the covenant he made with Abraham

and the oath he swore to Isaac.

He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree,

and to the people of Israel as a never-ending

covenant:

“I will give you the land of Canaan

as your special possession.”

He said this when you were few in number,

a tiny group of strangers in Canaan.

They wandered from nation to nation,

from one kingdom to another.

Yet he did not let anyone oppress them.

He warned kings on their behalf:

“Do not touch my chosen people,

and do not hurt my prophets.”

^{Ps}He called for a famine on the land of Canaan,

cutting off its food supply.

Then he sent someone to Egypt ahead of them—

Joseph, who was sold as a slave.

They bruised his feet with fetters

and placed his neck in an iron collar.

Psa. 44

Confession of national sin and prayer for restoration.

For the choir director: A psalm^a of the descendants of Korah.

O God, we have heard it with our own ears—
 our ancestors have told us
 of all you did in their day,
 in days long ago:
 You drove out the pagan nations by your power
 and gave all the land to our ancestors.
 You crushed their enemies
 and set our ancestors free.
 They did not conquer the land with their swords;
 it was not their own strong arm that gave them victory.
 It was your right hand and strong arm
 and the blinding light from your face that helped them,
 for you loved them.

You are my King and my God.
 You command victories for Israel.^b
 Only by your power can we push back our enemies;
 only in your name can we trample our foes.
 I do not trust in my bow;
 I do not count on my sword to save me.
 You are the one who gives us victory over our enemies;
 you disgrace those who hate us.
 O God, we give glory to you all day long
 and constantly praise your name.

Interlude

But now you have tossed us aside in dishonor.
 You no longer lead our armies to battle.
 You make us retreat from our enemies
 and allow those who hate us to plunder our land.
 You have butchered us like sheep
 and scattered us among the nations.
 You sold your precious people for a pittance,
 making nothing on the sale.
 You let our neighbors mock us.
 We are an object of scorn and derision to those
 around us.
 You have made us the butt of their jokes;
 they shake their heads at us in scorn.
 We can't escape the constant humiliation;
 shame is written across our faces.
 All we hear are the taunts of our mockers.
 All we see are our vengeful enemies.

All this has happened though we have not forgotten
 you.
 We have not violated your covenant.

^aHebrew *maskil*. This may be a literary or musical term. ^bHebrew for *Jacob*. The names "Jacob" and "Israel" are often interchanged throughout the Old Testament, referring sometimes to the individual patriarch and sometimes to the nation.

Our hearts have not deserted you.
 We have not strayed from your path.
 Yet you have crushed us in the jackal's desert home.
 You have covered us with darkness and death.
 If we had forgotten the name of our God
 or spread our hands in prayer to foreign gods,
 God would surely have known it,
 for he knows the secrets of every heart.
 But for your sake we are killed every day;
 we are being slaughtered like sheep.

Wake up, O Lord! Why do you sleep?
 Get up! Do not reject us forever.
 Why do you look the other way?
 Why do you ignore our suffering and oppression?
 We collapse in the dust,
 lying face down in the dirt.
 Rise up! Help us!
 Ransom us because of your unfailing love.

Prayer for God to use limitless power to restore the people.

Psa. 74

A psalm^a of Asaph.

O God, why have you rejected us so long?
 Why is your anger so intense against the sheep of your own
 pasture?
 Remember that we are the people you chose long ago,
 the tribe you redeemed as your own special possession!
 And remember Jerusalem,^b your home here on earth.
 Walk through the awful ruins of the city;
 see how the enemy has destroyed your sanctuary.

There your enemies shouted their victorious battle cries;
 there they set up their battle standards.
 They swung their axes
 like woodcutters in a forest.
 With axes and picks,
 they smashed the carved paneling.
 They burned your sanctuary to the ground.
 They defiled the place that bears your name.
 Then they thought, "Let's destroy everything!"
 So they burned down all the places where God was
 worshiped.

We no longer see your miraculous signs.
 All the prophets are gone,
 and no one can tell us when it will end.
 How long, O God, will you allow our enemies to insult
 you?
 Will you let them dishonor your name forever?

^aHebrew *maskil*. This may be a literary or musical term.

^bHebrew *Mount Zion*.

OCTOBER 18



JESUS THE CHRIST

(Ca. 5 B.C.–A.D. 30)

The Coming of the Messiah



All is now ready for the most important event in human history. It is an event planned even before the creation of the world. It is the keeping of a promise made to Abraham over 2000 years earlier. It is the fulfillment of a host of prophecies regarding a Messiah who would come to establish his kingdom. Most importantly, it is the beginning of a dynamically new relationship between God and man. The event is the coming of the Savior of the world, the Messiah—or, as referred to in the Greek, the Christ.

This Christ is not to be just another world leader, as Cyrus, Alexander, or Caesar. He is not to be just another great man of God, as Abraham, Moses, or David. He is to be God himself in human flesh! The Lord of heaven is to become a servant of the earth. God, who has previously made himself known through a nation and a law, is now to reveal himself in the most personal way possible—in the form of a man. Until now God’s blessings have been reserved mostly for a chosen people, but now they are to become available to all people in every generation.

Who is this Christ, this Messiah? His name is Jesus. His symbolic name, Immanuel (meaning “God with us”), signifies his deity. He is man, to be sure, but God as well; and he is God—the God of Creation—but man as well. God lowers himself so that man might be elevated. He leaves heaven so that man might enter it. To man, who cannot begin to understand the ways of God, it is clearly a great mystery. But what a marvelous and wonderful mystery it is!

As the New Testament record now begins, the Scriptures proclaim the good news about the salvation of mankind which comes through obedient faith in Jesus the Christ. The good news begins with the miraculous birth of Jesus to a virgin of Galilee in the days of Herod, King of Judea. Then, as Jesus grows into manhood, his coming as the promised Messiah and Savior is announced by John the Baptist. As Jesus begins his own ministry, he confirms his deity with miraculous healings and other signs and wonders, and proclaims the imminent coming of the kingdom of God. His teaching calls men and women to new spiritual heights in their worship of God and in their relationships with one another.

But because his teaching challenges traditional practices of the Jewish religion of his day, and because he claims divine authority, Jesus meets strong opposition from religious leaders. That opposition ultimately leads to arrest

and trial before Jewish and Roman authorities. Although falsely accused, Jesus is condemned and sentenced to die by crucifixion—an event which is intended to silence both the man and his message. Instead, the good news comes to a powerful climax when, on the third day after his death, Jesus rises from the grave and shows himself alive, proving his own miraculous resurrection. The Christian hope which derives from the gospel message is that, just as Jesus is raised from the dead, so also the righteous in Christ will be raised to eternal life!

The Gospel Accounts

Although secular history attests to his ministry and influence, the details of Jesus' life were never preserved in an explicitly biographical form. What is known about the historical Jesus comes primarily from the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—four of Jesus' disciples. However, none of the accounts purports to be a biography of Jesus, as such, despite the fact that certain aspects of his life are covered in great detail and are usually set within specific historical contexts. The Gospel accounts, while clearly historic in nature, are principally documents of faith—the record of those events and teachings upon which Jesus' followers based their belief and hope. Therefore, the exact times and places of those events are not always recorded, and the actual sequence of events can be traced with only limited certainty.

The Gospel accounts vary in the order in which the record of Jesus' ministry is presented. Apart from the fact that the Gospel accounts were never intended as chronological records, the differences in sequential order may be attributed to several factors. First of all, each account was written by a different author, each having a unique perspective. Each writer also focused upon different events, either because he was writing primarily to a particular audience or because he wished to achieve a particular purpose in his writing. This is especially true, for example, of John's account. This also explains why some events are recorded by only one, or perhaps two, of the Gospel writers, and why one account will include certain particulars not included in other accounts of the same event. Although a cursory reading of the different accounts can seem somewhat confusing, careful study discloses a striking harmony not expected of purely human documents which might have been written under the same diversity of time and circumstances.

What follows is a combination of the four Gospel accounts with an integration of the recorded events as nearly as possible in their proper chronological sequence. As previously indicated, any such attempt necessarily involves a degree of speculation, because it is simply not revealed when certain events actually occurred. It is not even certain whether Jesus' entire ministry lasted for 2½ years or for 3½ years. Each position has its supporters. Much of the problem of dating depends upon which festivals Jesus attended, and upon references to certain seasons of the year. The harmony which follows assumes a 3½-year ministry.

While major areas of Jesus' ministry can be ascertained fairly easily, it is not always easy to know which events occurred within which major ministry.

be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

Lk.
2:15–20

SHEPHERDS VISIT BABY. When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

Mt. 1:25b
Lk. 2:21

JESUS CIRCUMCISED AND NAMED. Eight days later, when the baby was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel even before he was conceived.

Lk.
2:22–24
Jerusalem

JESUS PRESENTED IN TEMPLE. Then it was time for their purification offering, as required by the law of Moses after the birth of a child; so his parents took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. The law of the Lord says, "If a woman's first child is a boy, he must be dedicated to the LORD."^a So they offered the sacrifice required in the law of the Lord—"either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."^b

Lk.
2:25–35

SIMEON EXPRESSES HIS JOY. At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

"Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace,
as you have promised.
I have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared for all people.
He is a light to reveal God to the nations,
and he is the glory of your people Israel!"

Jesus' parents were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby's mother, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise. He has

^aExod 13:2.

^bLev 12:8.

been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul.”

ANNA THE PROPHETESS. Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years. Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four.^a She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer. She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem.

Lk.
2:36–38

Visit of the Magi and Flight into Egypt



The rite of purification takes place 40 days after Jesus’ birth and ordinarily would have required the offering of a yearling lamb and a pigeon. However, the law permits poor parents, such as Joseph and Mary, to offer a second pigeon or dove instead of the lamb, which they cannot afford. Thus, even by his parents’ offering of purification, it can be seen that Jesus comes humbly into the world.

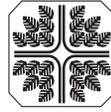
Despite these lowly beginnings, news of Jesus’ birth spreads quickly throughout Judea and even beyond its borders. Matthew records the account of a visit to Bethlehem by certain philosopher-priests who, interestingly enough, may even be pagan Zoroastrians from Persia. Their presumed contact with Jews of the Dispersion has undoubtedly made them familiar with the Jewish Messiah of prophecy. The Magi are prompted to travel the great distance to Jerusalem because of a star which appeared at the time of Jesus’ birth. It is not known how many make the long journey (certainly no compelling evidence exists for the traditional three), but they apparently arrive some six months after Jesus’ birth and inquire as to the child’s whereabouts. By this time Joseph and Mary have found accommodations in a house, and it is in this house that the Magi’s gifts are offered to the newborn “King of the Jews.”

King Herod is alarmed by the Magi’s visit because he believes Jesus’ birth poses a political threat to his reign. Because of this, Herod sends his soldiers to Bethlehem to kill all male children who might have been born within the time-frame suggested by the Magi’s calculations. By Jewish reckoning, any child over 12 months is considered two years old. Since apparently six months have passed following Jesus’ birth, Herod makes his order broad enough to prevent any mistake by including all of the estimated 40 to 50 baby boys in Bethlehem who would be up to 12 or 13 months old at this time.

As will be seen, however, Joseph will be warned about the slaughter and will quickly depart for Egypt, where he and Mary and the child Jesus will stay until after Herod’s own death.

^aOr *She had been a widow for eighty-four years.*

NOVEMBER 20



CHRIST'S CHURCH AND THE APOSTLES

(Ca. A.D. 30–100)

Acts of the Apostles



As the Gospel accounts come to a close with Jesus' ascension, the focus of Scripture turns to the work of the apostles and others in their efforts to spread the good news about Jesus throughout the world and to the beginning of the church, which is comprised of Christ's faithful disciples. The historical record of the church in the first 30 years of its history, commonly known as the Acts of the Apostles, is evidently written by Luke. Luke's writing records many of the acts of some of the apostles, principally those of Peter and of Paul (who will become a special apostle), and also includes the work of others, such as Stephen, Philip, Barnabas, and Silas. More importantly, Luke records the work of the Holy Spirit in the church of the first century. After a brief introduction to his writing, Luke stresses the powerful manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the confirmation and spread of the gospel message.

INTRODUCTION TO BOOK. In my first book^a I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit. During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.

Acts 1:1–5
Jerusalem
(Ca. A.D.
30)

Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, "Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. John baptized with^b water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Power of the Holy Spirit

As recorded in the Gospel accounts, Jesus had told the apostles to wait in Jerusalem until they should receive power from on high, a reference undoubtedly to the power of God's Holy Spirit, which he had promised they would receive. Luke begins his historical record with the account of a special demonstration of God's power in the ministry of the

^aThe reference is to the Gospel of Luke.

^bOr *in*; also in 1:5b.

apostles. The occasion is the Festival of Pentecost, which is celebrated by the Jews each year 50 days after Passover. Also known as the Festival of Harvest, the festival was originally given in celebration of the firstfruits of the harvest. As one of the three major Jewish festivals, Pentecost attracts large numbers of Jews to Jerusalem from throughout the world.

Here in the midst of a throng of Pentecost celebrants, the Holy Spirit descends in power upon the small band of Galilean men whom Jesus has chosen to be his spokesmen. Amazingly, they are heard speaking in all the native languages represented in Jerusalem, declaring the wonders of God. Luke records the sermon preached by Peter, which is a stirring call for the Jews to see Jesus both as the Messiah of prophecy and as the resurrected Lord. When Peter strongly indicts his audience for having played a part in crucifying their Messiah, thousands immediately repent and are baptized. This occasion heralds not only the special power of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of the apostles, but also the formal beginning of Christ's spiritual body, the church.

Acts 2:1-4 THE HOLY SPIRIT. On the day of Pentecost^a all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages,^b as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

Acts 2:5-13 SPEAKING IN OTHER LANGUAGES. At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.

They were completely amazed. "How can this be?" they exclaimed. "These people are all from Galilee, and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!" They stood there amazed and perplexed. "What can this mean?" they asked each other.

But others in the crowd ridiculed them, saying, "They're just drunk, that's all!"

Acts 2:14-36 PETER PROCLAIMS JESUS AS CHRIST. Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other apostles and shouted to the crowd, "Listen carefully, all of you, fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Make no mistake about this. These people are not drunk, as some of you are assuming. Nine o'clock in the morning is much too early for that. No, what you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel:

'In the last days,' God says,
'I will pour out my Spirit upon all people.

^aThe Festival of Pentecost came 50 days after Passover (when Jesus was crucified).

^bOr *in other tongues*.