



INTRODUCING

THE GOSPEL

An introduction to Jesus Christ





Lesson 2: An introduction to Jesus Christ

Introduction

Jesus Christ is by far the most significant figure in real Christianity, so it is important for anyone who wishes to understand the Gospel to understand Jesus' life.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea a little over two thousand years ago. For about 30 years, little was heard of him, but then he began a programme of teaching and healing, known as his ministry, which lasted for about three and a half years.

Peter, a follower of Jesus, summarised his ministry in **Acts 10**:

“You yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.”

Acts 10:37-41

The Apostles had been with Jesus through much of his ministry. They were chosen as people who would act as a witness to his actions. Four of them write from the view of an eyewitness, or someone who had access to eyewitnesses, about Jesus' life and ministry in books which are known as the four 'Gospels' of the New Testament - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

In this chapter, you will learn:

- The unique circumstances of Jesus' birth
- An overview of Jesus' life and ministry
- Why Jesus and God are separate



The birth of Jesus

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea in the closing years of the reign of Herod the Great. Bethlehem is a town five miles south of Jerusalem, and would have been small at this time - so Jesus was born in a provincial town to parents who would hardly be known in it.

After the birth of Jesus, Herod was visited by wise men from the east who, without meaning to cause harm, told him that someone who would one day be king of Israel had been born in Bethlehem. Afraid of a potential rival to his house, Herod took steps to remove the threat by killing all of the children under two years old in the town, but the family had already escaped with baby Jesus to Egypt.

After Herod died, Archelaus - who was every bit as dangerous - succeeded his father as ruler of Judea. Jesus' family eventually settled in Nazareth in Galilee, where his mother Mary had lived.



A miraculous birth

The birth of Jesus was special; he was born as the result of a miracle. This is described in some detail in two of the New Testament Gospels - Matthew and Luke - and is mentioned in passing in other Bible writings.

The key fact is that Jesus had no human father. He was born as the result of a miracle, where God used his power to cause Mary to have a baby.



“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.”

Matthew 1:18

The meaning of this is described further in a passage from the book of Luke. An angel appears to Mary to explain to her what is going to happen:

“And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.””

Luke 1:30-33

Here, the angel tells Mary that she will have a baby - the Messiah promised in the Old Testament, who will rule an eternal kingdom covering the whole world. She was to call the baby “Jesus”, meaning “God saves”, or “Saviour”.

But Mary needs further explanation, as she has never been involved in a sexual relationship:

“And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.”

Luke 1:34-35

According to this passage, Jesus would be known as the ‘Son of God’, because he had no human father - his only father is God. Whenever the phrase ‘Son of God’ is used, this is a reminder of the fact that Jesus was born to a virgin mother.

Family life

Jesus’ family consisted of his mother Mary, her husband Joseph, and several other children. We aren’t told much about the wider family in the Bible, except in the occasional verse like this one in Matthew:



“Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us?”

Matthew 13:55-56

This size of family - four brothers and at least three sisters - would not be unusual in Galilee in the first century AD.

Jesus remained in Nazareth until he was about thirty years old. At this point, he began his three and a half year period of teaching and healing, which ended up in his death and resurrection.

Jesus’ ministry

The ministry of Jesus began when he was baptised in the river Jordan by John the Baptist. For a while, he took his disciples into Judea where they baptised many others, but when John was arrested by Herod - a different Herod to the one alive at his birth - Jesus returned to Galilee.

Jesus based his operations in Capernaum, a town on the sea of Galilee, but made various tours of other towns and villages where he proclaimed the Kingdom of God and healed the sick. He also visited Jerusalem for Jewish festivals.

Finally, he and his disciples went to Jerusalem at Passover time, and there he was arrested and executed. On the third day after his death, he was raised by God.

Jesus and God are separate

From the earliest mentions of Jesus, the Bible always makes a very clear distinction between Jesus and God. **Luke 1:32**, which we read above, says “And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David.” As God is to give Jesus the throne of David, Jesus cannot be God, or God would be giving the throne of David to himself.

Key chapter to read: Acts 10

There are numerous examples throughout the Bible of God being described as a separate entity who interacts with Jesus, and **Acts 10** is just one example, where the Apostle Peter outlines the good news about Jesus:



- v38 - God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit
- v38 - God was with him
- v40 - God raised him on the third day
- v42 - he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead

Clearly these passages are describing Jesus as someone who is distinct from God. There are two ways in which this is indicated:

1. The passages describe occasions where **God has done something for Jesus**, e.g. if God has appointed Jesus as judge, they must be different beings
2. In each case, **Jesus is under the authority of God**, e.g. Jesus has the Holy Spirit because God gives it to him, which is a case of the greater exercising authority with the less.

This picture of Jesus, who is not God but who represents God and is the Son of God is a consistent picture not just from the Apostles, but throughout the whole Bible.

The other crucial reason that Jesus is not God is that Jesus died on the cross, as we saw from Lesson 1. Without the death of Jesus, we have no mechanism for the forgiveness of sins - a principle we will look at in later lessons.

Finally, it is also worth noting that Jesus spoke to God frequently, and on a number of occasions refers to him as "My God"; a separate being. One of these occasions is as he was dying on the cross:

"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?""

Matthew 27:46

God, however, cannot die. God is the source of life for everyone and everything - a living God.

Jesus reveals God

Jesus may not BE God, but he does have an important role in showing us what God is like.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all



things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Hebrews 1:1-4

This passage points out that although God has spoken to us in many different ways, he is *revealed* through Jesus Christ. Jesus is the imprint of God - the closest possible image. If we wish to know what God is about, we must look to Jesus.

“...the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

2 Corinthians 4:4

But like a son or daughter might be the ‘image’ of their father or mother, there is a difference between the image and the original.

Shortly before Jesus’ crucifixion, he asked his hearers to show him a coin, in **Luke 20:24**.

“Whose image and inscription are on this?” he asked. The answer was **“Caesar’s”**.

The image of Caesar was on the coin, just as Jesus is the image of God. But the coin was made of metal; Caesar was made of flesh and bones. When the Bible describes Jesus as the image of God, it is important not to confuse the image with the substance.

Jesus reveals God in a way which is unmatched by any other being.

Lesson summary:

1. Jesus was born in Bethlehem and grew up in Nazareth with brothers and sisters
2. His mother Mary was a virgin, and he was the Son of God
3. Jesus is not God; he shows what God is like



Lesson 2 summary questions:

1: Have a look at **Luke 1:30-37**. This tells of an angel coming to Mary to tell her about Jesus' birth.

- a) What is Mary told to do in v31?
- b) What three predictions are made about Jesus?
- c) Why is Jesus to be called the Son of God? (v35)

2: Read the account of the baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan by John the Baptist in **Matthew 3:11-17**.

- a) Why was John reluctant to baptise Jesus, and what does Jesus tell him?
- b) What happens to Jesus as soon as he is baptised?
- c) What does the voice say?

3: The life of Jesus is summarised for us in **Acts 10:34-40**.

- a) What are the main features of Jesus' life mentioned in these verses?
- b) Who anointed Jesus with power? (v38)
- c) What was the role of the Apostles who were with Jesus? (v39-42)

Deeper dive questions

4: In **Hebrews 1:1-4**, we are introduced to the way that God reveals himself, and especially how he revealed himself in Jesus.

- a) When did God speak to the Fathers? (v1 - but you might like to look at some examples from the Old Testament as well)
- b) What are some of the ways God used to speak to people in the past? (v1)
- c) What relationship is Jesus described as having with God? (v2-4)
- d) What world did Jesus create? (v2, ch2:5)