

The Story of the Life of Christ – Lesson 1

Introduction

In presenting the story of the Life of Christ my purpose is to let the word of God speak for itself. It is also to show you some of the tools I have discovered in my sixty years of study that it might aid you to find the incomparable joy of digging the nuggets out for yourself. To let the Word of God speak it helps to have the whole Word of God in view. It is important to understand that the Word of God does not contradict accurate History. Actually, when you dig down, you will discover that the details of History often amplify the meaning of the message of the Word of God. As we proceed in our study, I think you will be surprised to find how many details in the story of the life of Christ have been distorted by tradition or just overlooked by ignorance. I certainly was.

The Four Gospels

The first things we need to have in view to tell the complete story of the life of Christ are all four Gospels at once. While the Holy Spirit communicates truth whenever you read any one of the Gospels separately, there are sections that you cannot fully comprehend unless you have the perspective provided by the information from all four Gospels. At first reading, there are sometimes parts of the Gospels that seem to contradict other parts. However, with deeper study, it becomes clear that they never contradict each other.

Strictly speaking, none of the four gospel writers identify themselves. However, tradition and early testimony by other Christian sources from the first or second centuries confirm the traditional authorship as being accurate. They were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Also, there is strong internal evidence within each Gospel of their true authorship by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as tradition holds.

The Four Gospels and their Authors

The Gospel of Matthew was written by Matthew who was also known as Levi. He had been a tax collector and was one of the twelve apostles who were given the closest access to the Lord. According to tradition and just plain sense, it was the first Gospel to be written, and it was the Gospel that was most obviously written to the Jews, the people of the Church's first mission field. It contains far more quotations of the Jewish Old Testament than any other Gospel. The Genealogy of Christ in Matthew goes back to Abraham the first patriarch of Israel. According to Papias, who lived early in the 2nd Century A.D., it was written originally in Aramaic (a dialect of Hebrew). That makes sense since it was written to the Jews. The Apostle Matthew is never mentioned in the Book of Acts after the first chapter. That also seems to confirm that this was the **first** Gospel written. In other words, Matthew probably was one of those who left Judea as a missionary during the early persecutions of the Church in Jerusalem. He probably left to

minister to the Jewish diaspora in the East. He probably wrote this before he left Israel. My guess is it was written sometime between 35 A.D. and 40 A.D.

The Gospel of Mark was written by Mark. Mark's mother's house in Jerusalem was where the early church often met. It was probably the house where the Last Supper was held. Mark was quite likely the young man who fled from the garden naked during Jesus' arrest at Gethsemane.¹ Mark was the nephew of Barnabas and accompanied him and Paul on their first missionary journey from Antioch to Cyprus and Asia Minor. He later accompanied Paul to Rome for his trial before Caesar. Afterward Mark spent several years with Peter in Babylon and Asia Minor. The Gospel of Mark was probably originally written to the church in Antioch (although many think it was to the Church at Rome). Mark spent a good deal of time in both places. Early tradition was that Mark got a good deal of his material from the testimony of Peter with whom he had a close relationship for at least 30 years. It was possibly written as late as after Peter's death in 67 A.D. It was probably written after Mark travelled to be with Peter in Babylon in 62 A.D.

The Gospel of Luke – written by Luke, the Gentile physician who accompanied Paul on most of his journeys after 50 A.D. During his journeys with Paul, he would have had an opportunity to talk to Peter, John, James and Jude the Lord's half-brothers, Mary the Lord's mother, as well as many others who knew Jesus and were eyewitnesses of his First Advent. The Gospel of Luke was certainly written before Acts (Acts specifically stated that it was written after Luke's Gospel). I believe that Luke's Gospel was probably written between 60 A.D. and 70 A.D. Luke was the only Gentile author of the New Testament, and it is notable that the Genealogy in Luke goes back to Adam who was a Gentile.

The Gospel of John is traditionally considered to have been written by the Apostle John from Ephesus where he had been ministering for some years. It was written not long before John wrote the Book of Revelation, which was written in the closing years of the Roman Emperor Domitian, circa 95 A.D. Because it refers to the death of Peter in 66 A.D., we know that it was written after that event. The omission of the prophecies that Jesus had made about the destruction of Jerusalem (which were included in the three earlier Gospels) also seems to indicate that it was written after the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.). Also, the testimony of John 21:22-23, which speaks of the writer's great age, indicates that when the Gospel was written he was very old (at least in his nineties). These facts seem to confirm the traditional date of writing as about 95 A.D. during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian.

Although the narrative in the Gospel of John never mentions the author by name, it is clear the author was one of the twelve disciples. This also points to John as the author. Of the twelve disciples, only those not mentioned by name in the Gospel could be eligible. John, his brother

¹ *Mark was dressed only in his bedclothes. He would have been asleep in the house when the Jews came to arrest Jesus. He tried to get to the garden before the arresting party, even though not dressed. He was too late.*

James, James, son of Alpheus, Simon Zelotes and Matthew make up the short list of five not mentioned. James the brother of John died early and was the first of original Apostles to die. Mathew had already written a gospel account. That leaves John, Simon Zelotes, and James, son of Alpheus as possible candidates. All the accounts in John indicate that the author of the gospel had a very close relationship with Peter. Every account in Acts and the other gospels indicate that John was the closest to Peter of all the disciples.

Besides the Biblical evidence there is a very strong extra-biblical testimony that John was the author. In one of the fragments of Papias, who was taught by John himself, it is recorded that there was a Gospel which was written by John. In fact, it was first called the “Gospel according to the Hebrews.” This reflected John’s usual modesty.

John was one of the three disciples who were closest to Jesus. Those three included John, his brother James, and Peter. John wrote this Gospel very late in a long life. It was the last of the Gospels written and fills in gaps left in the other three. While the first three (which are sometimes called the Synoptic Gospels) tend to cover the same story from different perspectives, John’s gospel, written about sixty years later, fills in gaps and gives the perspective of years. John was one of the first two disciples of Jesus. Jesus was pointed out to John by his teacher, John the Baptist, just after Jesus came back from His temptation in the desert. John was also the only disciple who witnessed all the trials of Jesus and he stood at the foot of the cross when Jesus was crucified when all the other disciples had fled. Thus, he was able to tell us more about the early years of Jesus’ ministry and more about His last day on earth than some of the others.

Christ is Revealed in the Old Testament

The next part of the scripture we need to study in telling the story of the Life of Christ is the Old Testament. In some ways the Old Testament tells us more about Christ than the New Testament. This is revealed in 1 Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 2:16 “For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?”² But we have the mind of Christ.”

Remember, that at the time that Paul wrote that verse, no more than 10% of the New Testament had been written. Thus, Paul had to be referring primarily to the Old Testament.

The following four New Testament passages also refer to the fact that Jesus Christ was revealed in the Old Testament:

Luke 24:25-27 “He (*Jesus*) said to them (*the disciples on the road to Emmaus after Jesus’ resurrection*), ‘How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have

² *Isaiah 40:13*

spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."

Luke 24:44 "He (*Jesus*) said to them (*the disciples after the resurrection*), 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.'"

Romans 16:25-27 "Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him-- to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen."

1 Corinthians 10:1-11 -- This is too long for me to include, however, in summary it says that the whole Exodus of Israel was a type of what Christ would accomplish. Look it up later.

The Old Testament tells us about Christ in several ways. First, there is the direct prophecy of events related to the birth, life, and death of Christ such as the prophecy of the star that heralded His birth:

Numbers 24:17 "I (*Balaam speaking through the Holy Spirit*) see him (*the coming Messiah*), but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob;³ a scepter⁴ will rise out of Israel."

The Old Testament also gives us direct insights into the mind of Christ, long before He ever lived. Psalm 22 is an example. It prophesies in detail His thoughts on the cross and the details of His death:

Psalm 22:1-7, 16 "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?⁵ Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel. In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed. But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults,

³ This was the prophecy of the star of Bethlehem heralding Jesus' birth.

⁴ The Hebrew word here is שֵׁבֶט {shā'-vet} which can be translated "rod, staff, branch, offshoot, club, scepter, or tribe. It is the mark of authority. In this case it was the sign of the promised King of all the tribes of Israel.

⁵ Matthew 27:46 "About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?'—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Also see Mark 15:34

shaking their heads: ---- Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.”

We will study this passage in detail much later in this study when we reach the Gospels’ accounts of the Crucifixion.

The Old Testament also gives us prophecies of Christ’s life and death by the use of types and shadows. In Genesis, the power of the staff of Moses was a type of the power of Jesus’ death on the Cross. The sea was a type of God’s judgment. As the staff was stretched out against the Red Sea, it parted and the Israelites passed through unharmed. When the Egyptians tried to cross without the power of the staff, they all perished. The incident was a type or shadow of the power of the Cross over judgment for sin. In the incidents of Israel’s history the Old Testament is full of types and shadows of God’s ultimate truths about Christ.

The shadows and types are particularly apparent in the construction of the Tabernacle of Moses and its furniture. They were also apparent in the worship. The types carried on to the two Temples that succeeded the Tabernacle. The New Testament book of Hebrews gives an explanation of a type in the function of the High Priest.

Hebrews 9:2-8 “A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense ⁶ and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron’s staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now. When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.⁷ The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing.”⁸

The Importance of Understanding the History of the Times

One cannot fully understand the Gospels without understanding the place and times in which they transpired. When I was still a teenager, almost sixty years ago, I started to realize there was

⁶ *Strictly speaking, the Golden Altar of Incense was in front of the curtain, but the altar was most intimately related to the Most Holy Place as it was always related to addressing God, whose presence was in the Most Holy Place, above the cherubim on the Ark.*

⁷ *The High Priest entered twice on the same day. Once for himself, once for the people of Israel (Leviticus 16:11-16).*

⁸ *By implication, Paul was saying that the destruction of the Temple would announce that the way into the presence of God had been disclosed.*

a real problem in contemporary Biblical scholarship on the Chronology of the Life of Christ. As I studied, first this teacher, then that Biblical scholar, gave wildly inconsistent dates for the events surrounding the First Advent of Jesus Christ. The birth of Christ was set variously from 6 BC to 1 A.D. The death of Christ was also set variously from 29 A.D. to 33 A.D. After a little study, it became apparent that none of these men had a Chronology that was consistent with either the testimony of the scriptures or recorded history.

For instance, 6 BC is a popular date given for Christ's birth, but it does not line up with what Luke tells us when he says that Jesus was nearly thirty in 26 A.D. (the fifteenth year of Tiberius' reign). Another popular date is 1 A.D. That is an impossible date for Jesus' birth, because history tells us indisputably that Herod the Great died in 4 BC, and both Matthew and Luke make it clear that Jesus was born before Herod died.

I discovered so many inconsistencies in Biblical commentaries, that it was very trying to my faith. Eventually, I had to make a decision. I decided that the Bible was true, and I would believe it regardless of the confusion of the commentators I had read. As for the question of the Chronology of the life of Christ, I concluded that would have to remain a mystery to me. How could I ever figure it out, if these wise and earnest Bible scholars hadn't? I would just trust to God that there was an answer that vindicated His word, even if I never found it.

If you are a Bible student, that is always a good plan because there will always be mysteries you don't understand in this lifetime. Besides, understanding the love of God in the scriptures, and living in the light of it, is far more important than chronologies. So, I dropped the matter, and never really went looking for a solution, but the question and the problem was always in the back of my mind.

However in these later years, God has been gracious to me. He has dropped one piece of information after another into my lap. I would be reading something totally unrelated, and an obscure footnote would have a missing part of the puzzle. This happened time and again. Slowly the pieces started to resolve themselves into what I believe is a true Chronology of the life of Christ. It reconciled all the New Testament passages, the Old Testament prophecies and the secular history of that era into one seamless whole, and it demonstrated how the dates and feasts of the Old Testament are foreshadows of Christ to an even greater degree than is generally realized. In this study of the story of the life of Christ, I will rely on the dates discovered in that chronology and I will give some details when those dates come up. My whole paper which substantiates that chronology is available on my website,⁹ but it is too long to be studied in detail here.

In arriving at that Chronology of Christ, there were three things I had to come to understand:

⁹ *The website is rstbiblestudy.net*

First, I had to understand that the dates in the Bible, particularly the dates of the Feasts and the Fasts, were often prophetically significant. A quick example of this is that the day and time of the slaying of the Passover Lamb in Exodus (twilight of 14th Nisan) was the same as the day and time of the crucifixion of the Lamb of God in 30 A.D.

Second, I had to understand the Jewish calendar and how it worked and still works.¹⁰

Third, I had to understand that the famous historian, Flavius Josephus, was not just a Jewish historian who witnessed many of the significant events of the 1st Century A.D. He was also a Jewish historian who became a Christian because of the things he witnessed. This conversion took place before he wrote his second great work, Antiquities of the Jews.¹¹ Many of the things he wrote there are of particular significance to the story of Christ.

I will take the time here to expand on Josephus who I believe God provided to give us a detailed history of the time by means of someone who lived during those times.

First of all, I should tell you who Josephus was. His full Latin name was Flavius Josephus. He was born in Jerusalem about 37 A.D. He was a member of the priestly line of Aaron and of the last Royal family of the Jews, the Hasmoneans (also called the Maccabees). He was also a Pharisee. He was the author of the only contemporary account of Jewish history in the 1st Century BC and 1st Century A.D. He was an eyewitness and important participant in the events surrounding the Jewish revolt of 66-70 A.D. He served as the commander of the Jewish resistance against the Romans in Galilee although only 30 years old. After about a year of heroic resistance, he was defeated and captured. He witnessed the rest of the war as a valued prisoner in the Roman camp. At first he was a prisoner, but by the time of the siege of Jerusalem he had become the honored guest of Titus, the commanding Roman General. How that came to pass is another story. He was finally adopted as a member of the Flavian family which was the family of the two Roman Generals that had defeated him and later took Jerusalem. They were the father and son, Flavius Vespasian and Flavius Titus. They went on to become the first two Roman Emperors of the Flavian line. Josephus wrote two great histories. The first was Wars of the Jews (covering the Jewish revolt and its causes). It was written about 74 A.D. Then he wrote Antiquities of the Jews (covering the entire history of the Jewish people

¹⁰ The web site <http://www.genealogy.org/~scottlee/calconvert.cgi> was active at the original writing of this paper. At this time, although you can download the program it can no longer be operated on that website. I can say for a certainty that without this site my work would have been next to impossible. I believe it is no coincidence that I was able to find it when I needed it. Hopefully the program will find a new home. However, at this date a **Hebrew calendar is available at <http://www.uwm.edu/~corre/calendar.html>**. Other valuable information about the Hebrew Calendar is also available at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/1584/index.html>

¹¹ I recommend the translation by Joseph Whiston (1716-1794) which is based on the full ancient manuscript. There is another version that is sometimes used which has carefully removed all the passages which relate to Christ. I wonder how that happened?!!

to the beginning of the revolt). It was written about 90 A.D. After I had studied Josephus, it became clear to me, both from my own observations and the notes of his 18th century English translator, William Whiston, that between his writing Wars of the Jews, and his writing of Antiquities of the Jews a great change had been wrought in his attitude toward the Pharisees and Priests of the Jews, and his attitude toward the Christians. In the first book his praise of the High Priests was effusive and Christ and the Christians aren't even mentioned. In the second book, he described the High Priests as treacherous and greedy. In the second book, Josephus made a point of mentioning Jesus, John the Baptist, and James. Twice he called Jesus "the Christ." This was in spite of the fact that he wrote Antiquities of the Jews during a severe persecution of Christians by the Emperor Domitian, the last of the Flavians. To me, it is clear that in the interim between the books, Josephus became a Christian. In the passages I have copied below, Josephus recorded the death of Christ, the death of John the Baptist, and the death of James, the half-brother of Jesus who was also the leader of the Church in Jerusalem:

Antiquities of the Jews, by Flavius Josephus, Book 18, Chapter 3, Paragraph 3. "Now there was about this time **Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure.** He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. **He was [the] Christ.** And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; **for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him.** And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day."

Antiquities of the Jews, by Flavius Josephus, Book 18, Chapter 5, Paragraph 2. "Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against **John, that was called the Baptist:** for Herod slew him, **who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; for that the washing [with water] would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away [or the remission] of some sins [only], but for the purification of the body; supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness.** Now when [many] others came in crowds about him, for they were very greatly moved [or pleased] by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion, (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise,) thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it would be too late. Accordingly he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Macherus, the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death. Now the Jews had an opinion that the destruction of this army was sent as a punishment upon Herod, and a mark of God's displeasure to him."

Antiquities of the Jews, by Flavius Josephus, Book 20, Chapter 9, Paragraph 1. "AND now Caesar, upon hearing the death of Festus, sent Albinus into Judea, as procurator. But the king

deprived Joseph of the high priesthood, and bestowed the succession to that dignity on the son of Ananus,¹² who was also himself called Ananus. Now the report goes that this eldest Ananus proved a most fortunate man; for he had five sons who had all performed the office of a high priest to God, and who had himself enjoyed that dignity a long time formerly, which had never happened to any other of our high priests. But this younger Ananus, who, as we have told you already, took the high priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews, as we have already observed; when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority]. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so **he assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned: but as for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done; they also sent to the king [Agrippa], desiring him to send to Ananus that he should act so no more, for that what he had already done was not to be justified; nay, some of them went also to meet Albinus, as he was upon his journey from Alexandria, and informed him that it was not lawful for Ananus to assemble a Sanhedrin without his consent. Whereupon Albinus complied with what they said, and wrote in anger to Ananus, and threatened that he would bring him to punishment for what he had done; on which king Agrippa took the high priesthood from him, when he had ruled but three months, and made Jesus, the son of Damneus, high priest.”**

Besides this, Josephus asserted that prophetic passages in the Old Testament which concerned the destruction of Jerusalem after the Messiah had come were fulfilled by the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. This also indicated that he believed that the Messiah had come.

You might ask yourself, if Josephus was a believer, why didn't he speak more clearly or in greater length in his second book? The answer is easy. He wrote and published Antiquities about the time the Emperor Domitian, the son and brother of his erstwhile patrons Vespasian and Titus, was embarking on the first empire wide, really severe, persecution focusing solely on Christians. Many prominent Roman citizens were exiled, imprisoned or executed. According to tradition, about this time, the Apostle John was exiled to the island of Patmos after they tried unsuccessfully to kill him by boiling him in oil. Josephus was just a historian¹³ who was a fairly new Christian. His testimony about Jesus, quoted above, is tucked in quietly into his history just before he embarked on an uncharacteristic narration of a Roman sex scandal, which has little to do with his history of the Jews. To me, it seems clear that he decided that, though it was

¹² *Ananus was another name for Annas who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas. Both were High Priests at the time of Jesus' ministry (Luke 3:2).*

¹³ *I find Josephus' interpretation of Jewish history gets less perfect the farther he gets from his own time, but that is true of all historians.*

dangerous, he felt it was important for him to put in a small quiet testimony of his new faith. However, he followed it by some purely Roman gossip that was so juicy that no Roman censor would be likely to remember the previous passage about Jesus.¹⁴ We have read the passages that he also included in Antiquities which are the only historical accounts of John the Baptist and the death of James the Just, the half-brother of Jesus.

In the run-up to the birth of Christ, it is also useful to understand a little about the history of Judea from their return from the Babylonian Captivity to the time Jesus was born. Below is a thumbnail sketch of that period.

History of Judea – the Previous Six Centuries

538 BC – the defeat of Babylon by the Persians and the return of the Jews to Jerusalem.

517 BC – the new Temple was completed in Jerusalem.

474 BC – Mordecai and Esther saved the Jews in all of the Persian Empire (including Judea).

459 BC – Ezra returned to Jerusalem and began to set things in order. Gates were built and a trench was dug to provide some security.¹⁵ After the trench was dug, a new wall were started.

446 BC – Enemies burned the gates and the parts of the walls that Ezra had started.¹⁶

445 BC – Nehemiah returned and built the basic walls and gates.

433 BC – Nehemiah completed the walls strong enough and high enough to withstand a siege.

Circa 350 BC – This was the date of the last entry of record in the Old Testament. This was Nehemiah 12:11 which recorded the name of Jaddua, the High Priest who welcomed Alexander the Great into Jerusalem in 332 BC.

334 BC – Alexander the Great defeated the Persians. For the next 170 years Judea was either in the possession of the Greek kings called the Seleucids, whose capital was in Antioch, Syria, or the Greek kings called the Ptolemies, whose capital was in Alexandria, Egypt. The events of this period had been prophesied in detail in Daniel 11.

161 BC – Judas Maccabeus won the war of independence from the Seleucid king called Antiochus Epiphanes. At that time, the Jews entered into a league of assistance with Rome (Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 12, Chapter 10, Paragraph 6). In the succeeding years, Judas Maccabeus and his successors reconquered Galilee and began populating it with Jews.

63 BC – Pompey the Great (the Roman Triumvir along with Crassus and Caesar) intervened in a civil war between the Jewish king John Hyrcanus II and his brother Aristobulus who had

¹⁴ *He seems to have succeeded as he lived past the death of Domitian and the end of that particular persecution of the Christians.*

¹⁵ *Daniel 9:25b “It (Jerusalem) will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.”*

¹⁶ *Nehemiah 1:3 “They said to me (Nehemiah), “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.”*

enlisted the help of the Parthians. He restored John Hyrcanus II to the High Priesthood and the kingship after driving the Parthians out and defeating the Jewish partisans of Aristobulus.

47 BC – Julius Caesar made Antipater the Roman Procurator and effectively the chief authority. Antipater had been the chief adviser of John Hyrcanus II. Antipater was ethnically an Idumean (Edomite) although he had converted to Judaism.

39 BC – Herod the Great, who was Antipater's son, was declared King of Judea by the Roman Senate at the urging of Mark Antony. He also received many of the surrounding territories including Samaria and Galilee.

20 BC – Herod began the rebuilding and replacing of Zerubbabel's Temple, although on a much grander scale.

4 BC – Jesus was born. Four months later, Herod the Great died. He was replaced by his son Herod Archelaus in Judea and by his son Herod Antipas in Galilee.

The Jewish Calendar

In comprehending the Bible it is important to understand the Jewish Calendar in which the prophecies were played out. There is a pretty clear indication from both the Bible and secular sources that when God restored the world in Genesis He instituted a perfect chronological system whereby the earth circled the Sun every 360 days, and there was a New Moon every 30 days.¹⁷ There were exactly twelve months to a year. Every month was exactly one cycle of the moon. According to Scripture this timetable was in effect at the time of Noah's flood. That is shown by a logical examination of the following verses from Genesis:

Genesis 7:11 "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month--on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened."

Genesis 7:24 "The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days."

Genesis 8:1 "But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded."

Genesis 8:4 "and on the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat."

We have to conclude that the Ark came to rest at Ararat the day the waters began to recede. The Ark couldn't have come to rest before that. We have to conclude that this was a period of 150 days. This period is also described as from "the seventeenth day of the second month" to "the seventeenth day of the seventh month." Logic forces us then to conclude that at that time five months was 150 days. At the present time five lunar months would be 147½ days.¹⁸ We also therefore have to conclude that there has been a change in the cycles of the moon since Noah's time.

¹⁷ *From New Moon to New Moon is called a "synodic cycle" of the moon. This is currently exactly 29.530587981 days,*

¹⁸ *Since it had been 150 days, the lunar cycle couldn't have been less than 30 days.*

1 Chronicles 27:1-15 and 1 Kings 4:7 indicate that at the time of David and Solomon that a year was still made up of exactly 12 months.¹⁹ We also know that each month²⁰ began with the new moon, and the times of the Feasts of First Fruits, Pentecost, and Tabernacles were timed to coincide with the harvest season. If the kind of solar and lunar timetable we have now had been in effect, a lunar calendar with twelve months a year would have lost 9½ days a year to the seasons. If a 365¼ day year had been in effect in Moses time, after 20 years, the harvest Feast of Ingathering would be celebrated in the dead of winter. God is not stupid!

We know from secular history that, at least back to the 8th Century BC, the Babylonians recorded the months as being 29½ days, and yet from even more ancient Babylonian astronomers we inherited the 360 degree circle. The renowned scientist, Sir Isaac Newton²¹ was convinced that this was based on the fact that they had observed the complete cycle of the stars in their day to be 360 days. In other words each degree stood for one day. Some time, possibly at the time of Hezekiah's prayer,²² the cycle of the earth around the sun was altered from the ancient 360 days to the current 365¼ days, and the cycle of the moon around the earth was altered from the ancient 30 days to the current 29½ days. Although I didn't have the foresight to make a note of the source, I remember reading a paper on the internet by a scientist who was a Christian. It testified that according to the laws of physics a decrease of the speed of orbit of the earth around the sun from 360 days to 365¼ days would be naturally followed by an increase of the speed of the orbit of the moon around the earth from 30 days to 29½ days.

This is all very interesting and testifies to the accuracy of the Biblical account of ancient times, but what does it have to do with our study? It is simply this: after the change in the orbits of the earth and the moon, the Jews adjusted their calendar. They were not stupid. They knew, along with the rest of the ancient world, that there had been a change.²³ They changed to a calendar which added a thirteenth month as needed.²⁴ The schedule of when they added a thirteenth

¹⁹ Also see Psalms 104:19 "The moon marks off the seasons."

²⁰ It hardly seems necessary to point out that the word "month" is literally "moonth" or "cycle of the moon."

²¹ Isaac Newton was also a dedicated Christian.

²² Isaiah 38:7-8 "This is the LORD's sign to you that the LORD will do what he has promised: I will make the shadow cast by the sun go back the ten steps it has gone down on the stairway of Ahaz.' So, the sunlight went back the ten steps it had gone down." Also see 2 Kings 20:11

²³ The story of how the Babylonians came to Hezekiah's court because they had heard that the reason lay in Israel is instructive and provocative (Isaiah 39).

²⁴ One of the great contributions of Julius Caesar was the Julian Calendar which kept 12 months in a year but abandoned the lunar cycle as the basis for the length of the month. Our modern western calendar follows basically the same pattern that Julius Caesar instituted in 45 BC, although it was slightly modified by Pope Gregory in 1582. The Julian Calendar substituted for a Roman Calendar which had intercalary months like the Jewish calendar, but those months had to be decreed by the Pontifex Maximus. By Julius Caesar's time there had

month to keep the distortion at a minimum was dictated by mathematics, not by whim. The decree was issued annually, as a matter of form, from Jerusalem or Palestine until the 4th Century A.D. when the Christianized Roman Government started interfering with the issuance of the decree in order to help destroy the influence of Palestine and to fragment Judaism. As a consequence, at that time the Jewish authorities issued a table which could be followed from year to year indefinitely without direct instruction from Palestine.²⁵ The Jews still follow that schedule and it was certainly that same schedule which was in force in the time of Jesus. When the Roman Church went back to establish a schedule for celebrating Easter apart from the Jewish Calendar, they nonetheless pretty obviously relied on the Jewish schedule to discover the Julian date for the first Easter.²⁶

However, those in the modern church who are aware of this calendar seem to have ignored it in their studies. However, I think most are just unaware of it. That is sad, because the use of it helps bring all the dates of the Bible into harmony with the rest of the Bible and with history.

been too many stretches when the intercalary months had been omitted, so since he also filled the post of Pontifex Maximus, he decreed an entirely new calendar system.

When the Gregorian Calendar was adopted, ten days were added to the calendar to correct for slippage over 16 centuries. To prevent this slippage in the future an additional rule was instituted. Every two centuries a normal leap year is treated as a normal year by the following rule:

If the year can be evenly divided by 100, it is NOT a leap year, unless the year is also evenly divisible by 400. Then it is a leap year. This means that in the Gregorian calendar, the years 2000 and 2400 are leap years, while 1800, 1900, 2100, 2200, 2300 and 2500 are NOT leap years.

²⁵ *A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People, Edited by Eli Barnavy 1992, Schocken Books, New York, page 68 – “Meanwhile, conciliar decisions and Roman legal codes – first those of Theodosius, then of Justinian – redefined the legal and social status of the Jews. To neutralize the influence which Judaism still exercised on the religious life of eastern Christian communities, the Byzantine rulers issued prohibitions on marriage, commercial exchange, and social relations between Jews and Christians. The Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.), for example, decided to fix a constant date for Easter, a holiday which until then had been celebrated in the Orient on the same day as the Jewish Passover. While the bishops released their faithful from dependence on the Jewish proclamation of the festival, civil authorities intercepted Jewish emissaries who were dispatched from Palestine to inform the diaspora communities of the order of the calendar. These circumstances were probably the cause for the decision taken by the patriarch Hillel II in 359 to proclaim a permanent calendar calculated mathematically once and for all.”*

²⁶ *They wound up picking the closest possible year during which Passover had fallen on Friday which was 33 A.D.. This original error magnified the chronological distortions a hundred fold.*

It will be useful for you to know something of the Jewish calendar, both from standpoint of its Biblical origins, and the way it worked. To begin with, as per the scripture, the first day of every month was on the new moon.

Numbers 28:11-14 “**On the first of every month**, present to the LORD a burnt offering of two young bulls, one ram and seven male lambs a year old, all without defect. With each bull there is to be a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil; with the ram, a grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil; and with each lamb, a grain offering of a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil. This is for a burnt offering, a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the LORD by fire. With each bull there is to be a drink offering of half a hin of wine; with the ram, a third of a hin; and with each lamb, a quarter of a hin. **This is the monthly burnt offering to be made at each new moon during the year.**”

The New Moon Festivals on the first of each month were one of the three types of Jewish observances which were held to be most important along with the seventh day Sabbath and the three annual Feasts. The New Moon was only supposed to be celebrated on the day after the night the New Moon was spotted, but of course the priests in Jerusalem knew when it was to be expected from repeated measurement of the lunar cycle. Even so, great pains were taken to ensure actual observation, even to the setting of observation posts out in the generally cloudless southern desert in case visibility was limited in Jerusalem. Sightings were relayed very quickly by means of signal fires on mountain tops. In the rare instance when a sighting was not made on the night it might have been expected, the New Moon Festival was observed the next day regardless of whether it could be seen or not. With the New Moon, the month started, and the schedule of Feasts and Holidays were ordered accordingly. Under the changed lunar cycles, usually six of the months had 29 days and six of the months had 30, but some years could have it split up seven and five.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Tabernacles were celebrated on the full moon, the 15th of the month (Leviticus 23:6, Leviticus 23:33). These were two of the three original major feasts instituted by the Law of Moses. Later in the 5th century BC, the Feast of Esther (Purim) also was instituted on that date.

The new Jewish Calendar, which had to be instituted after the change of the solar cycle to 365¼ days per cycle, kept the dates as close to the solar seasons as possible by the following device. On a fixed schedule which was repeated every nineteen years, an additional month, or leap month is added. This month is added after the month of Adar, which on the religious calendar is the twelfth month. This extra month is called Adar 2. As the months start to lose ground to the Sun at the rate of about 9½ days a year, a little more than every third year, an extra month is added to bring the lunar calendar back to being a little ahead of the Solar seasons. As I said, when these months are added is dictated by a 19 year table, which in turn is dictated by mathematical and astronomical constants.

Several years ago, when I was looking for something else, I stumbled on a site on the internet which calculated any date into its counterpart in the Julian calendar, Gregorian calendar, Old French calendar, Julian day number, and Jewish calendar. Plus, it gave the day of the week. It not only stimulated a lot of study on my part about the Jewish calendar and its calculation and origins, but it allowed me to make calculations which were invaluable in this study. I have noted the website in my footnotes. I do not believe it is accessible on the internet at this time, but can be downloaded and run on your own computer. I have found others which are available at the current time and I have noted them further on in this study.

Jewish Time Keeping

Finally, it is important to understand that the Jewish day doesn't begin just after midnight, as our day begins. The Jewish day begins just after twilight, when the sun sets.

In the next lesson we will start with the earliest narrative in the Gospels, the account in Matthew of the Genealogy of Christ through Abraham. This genealogy was the proof that Jesus Christ was the "Son" who had been promised to so many of His forebears in that line. He was the Son of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David who would save the world.