

TEACHER'S EDITION

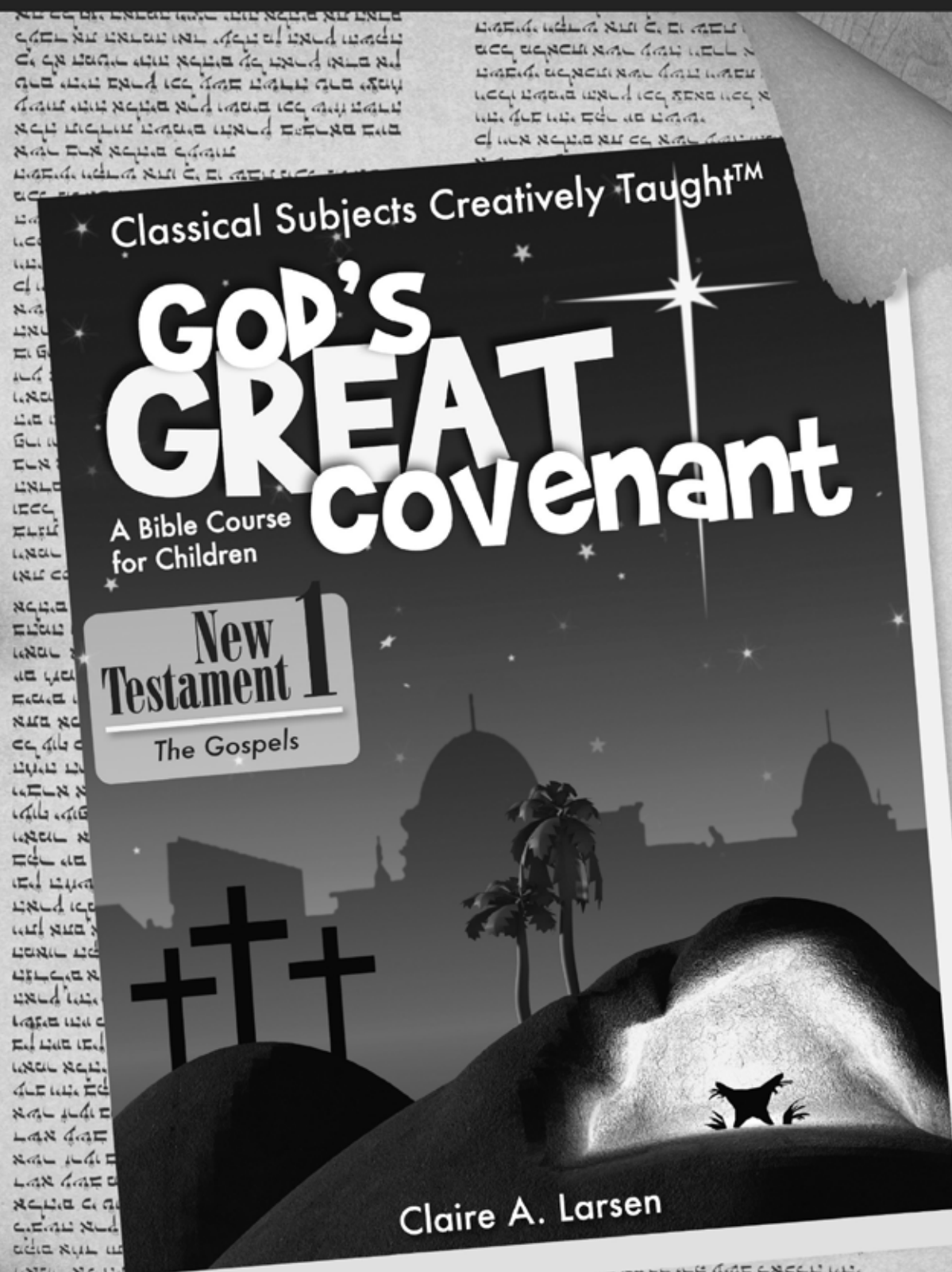
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GOD'S GREAT covenant

A Bible Course
for Children

New
Testament **1**
The Gospels

Claire A. Larsen





***God's Great Covenant, New Testament 1:
Teacher's Edition***

© Classical Academic Press, 2011
Version 1.0

ISBN-13: 978-1-60051-074-8

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Cover art by Rob Baddorf
Interior illustrations by Jason Rayner
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Classical Academic Press
3920 Market Street
Camp Hill, PA 17011

www.ClassicalAcademicPress.com

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my mother, Betty B. Arnold, who has told stories of Jesus to children for sixty years, and to my grandchildren, Lauren, Lyla, and Christian, who love to hear stories of Jesus.

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Introduction

Echoing again and again through the centuries, always the same, always bursting with promise and blessing, are the words of the LORD God promising His people: "I will be your God, and you will be My people."¹ It all began when God told an ordinary man named Abram to leave his home in Ur, a Middle Eastern center of wealth and culture, and travel to an unknown location. Abram wandered the fertile pasturelands and gentle mountain slopes of Canaan with his family and flocks. Three times the LORD God assured Abram (whose name God changed to Abraham) that He would be his God. He promised to give him a son, a land, and a blessing.²

Years passed. These words, repeated through divine appearances, dreams, and visions to Abraham's descendants, changed their lives. Time went by, and the family moved to Egypt to escape the famine in Canaan.

For 400 years while the family of 70 people grew to a nation of hundreds of thousands, the LORD's voice was silent. When the pharaoh of Egypt enslaved God's people,³ they groaned in their slavery and cried out for help.⁴ Their cry went up to God and He heard them. Not only was God concerned about them because of their harsh life, He also remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and was ready to send their deliverer.⁵ Then, in the wilderness of Midian, a shepherd named Moses heard God speak again. From a bush that glowed with fire but didn't burn up, the voice of the LORD said, "I AM WHO I AM. I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."⁶ The LORD told Moses to return to Egypt and deliver His people, the Israelites, from Pharaoh's slavery.⁷ The LORD repeated to the people the words that had brought hope to Abraham: "I will take you as My own people, and I will be your God."⁸

The next time the LORD spoke these words, they echoed off the craggy cliffs of Mt. Sinai amidst booming thunder, lightning flashes, and trumpet blasts.⁹ The LORD made a covenant, a divine promise, with the people of Israel to live among them, protect them from their enemies, and guide them safely to the land He was giving them.¹⁰ He promised to be their God, making a covenant with His people, but He also said that the people must worship only Him.¹¹

Actually, the covenant began in the Garden of Eden when into God's perfect garden, evil crept, and through lies and deceit, Satan tempted Eve to disobey God.¹² After Adam followed his wife's example and ate the fruit, God had to banish them from the garden.¹³ Before they

1. See Jeremiah 7:23.

2. See Genesis 12, 15, 17.

3. See Exodus 1:8-22.

4. See Exodus 2:23.

5. See Exodus 2:24-25.

6. See Exodus 3:14-15.

7. See Exodus 3:16-20.

8. See Exodus 6:7.

9. See Exodus 20:1, 18.

10. See Exodus 23:20-23.

11. See Exodus 23:24-25.

12. See Genesis 3:1-6.

13. See Genesis 3:6-13,

16-19, 23-24.

Notes

left in shame, God promised that He would send a Savior who would pay for their sin and make it possible for them to live eternally with Him.¹⁴ This was the beginning of God's covenant of grace.

The God of the covenant was also the King. He kept all His promises, but God's people, the Israelites, now living in the Promised Land, demanded that a human king rule over them. They rejected God as their King.¹⁵ God granted their desire, and human kings ruled Israel for over 500 years. Most of the kings were wicked men who hated the LORD and worshipped idols. Selfishness and a thirst for power soon split the kingdom in half. In the northern kingdom (named Israel), none of the kings followed the LORD, and after 200 years of idolatry and wickedness, God sent the murderous Assyrian army to judge Israel. Like a raging river at flood season, the Assyrians ravaged the land and killed or captured all but a few people. Never again did the northern kingdom exist as a nation.

Some of the kings in the southern kingdom (named Judah) kept the covenant and worshipped the LORD, but most of them worshipped the gods of the nations around them. Despite warnings from many prophets, the people persisted in their sin. The justice of the holy God required that Judah also experience God's judgment. The Babylonian army conquered Jerusalem, desecrated and destroyed Solomon's magnificent temple, and took the people into exile, leaving only a remnant in Jerusalem.

While God's people were in exile, prophets reminded them of the covenant. Jeremiah warned the few people left in Jerusalem, and Ezekiel comforted the exiles in Babylon with these words: "I will be your God and you will be my people."¹⁶ They said that the people would return to their land after seventy years.

God's people had suffered so much. Where was the LORD while all this was happening? Had He lost control of the nations? Was He helpless to bring about His plan of salvation? Worse yet, had He forgotten His people and the promises He had made to them through the years? Absolutely not! Behind the events of human history, God was reigning supreme. Everything was happening according to His plan. Through the mouths of the Old Testament prophets, two themes echoed again and again: *covenant* and *kingdom*. After the last prophet, Malachi, died and the LORD's voice was no longer heard, the faithful clung to the promises He had made.

Through another 400 years of silence, they waited and watched. Someone was coming who would bring about the new covenant.¹⁷ The LORD would forgive their sin, and once again

14. See Genesis 3:14-15.

15. See 1 Samuel 8:1-9.

16. Jeremiah 7:23; see Ezekiel 11:20.

17. See Jeremiah 31:31-34.

would they hear the blessed words, “I will be your God and you will be My people.” Someone was coming—a King and Messiah—who would rule wisely, do what was right, and deliver God’s people from their enemies.¹⁸ How long would they have to wait? No one knew for sure, and the wait seemed endless.

In *God’s Great Covenant, Old Testament 1*, the story of God’s covenant began. The LORD made a promise to be the God of His people and faithfully kept it. In *God’s Great Covenant, Old Testament 2*, the LORD was introduced as the Sovereign King who planned and controlled everything that happened in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Even though His people sinned and were conquered by enemy empires, He promised to send the Messiah.

In *God’s Great Covenant, New Testament 1*, Jesus, the Messiah and King, was born and fulfilled all God’s promises, but He did not arrive as people expected. The people were looking for a mighty warrior to deliver them from the oppressive Roman government. Instead, He came as the suffering Savior who would die at the hands of the Romans as the sacrifice for sin and death.¹⁹ He was building a kingdom that was not of this world—it was the kingdom of God.²⁰ He is the Son of Man, God’s Servant, the Messiah, and the Son of God. Each of the four units in this text emphasizes one of these names of Jesus. Of course, all through Jesus’ life, all four of these wonderful names applied to Him, but you will be learning about them one at a time and discovering in greater depth what they mean.

In the Old Testament, you read about prophets, priests, and kings. Some men, such as Samuel, had two of these important positions (prophet and priest), but no one was all three except Jesus, who, as Prophet, communicated God’s truth; as Priest, sacrificed Himself for His people’s sin; and, as King, rules supremely. Each chapter in this text points to ways in which Jesus serves His people as Prophet, Priest, and King.

In coming to earth, Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament covenant and ushered in the new covenant. The new covenant is not new in that it is different from the old covenant, but it’s new because it reaches deeper into the human heart and stretches out to the whole world.

Jesus comes with humility and gentleness, with power and authority, and with mysteries too incomprehensible for the human mind. Who is Jesus Christ? Let’s discover Him together.

The Covenant of Grace

From Adam to Jesus, the covenant of grace is not several covenants, but one covenant that unfolds through the years. The covenant began in the Garden of Eden with Adam.

18. See Jeremiah 23:4; Zechariah 9:9-17.

19. See Isaiah 53:6-9; John 3:16.

20. See John 18:36.

2 All through the gospels, the themes of Jesus as Prophet, Priest, and King occur over and over again. In each chapter of this book, examples of Prophet, Priest, and King roles are identified and explained.

3 In *God’s Great Covenant, New Testament 2*, which covers Acts, the epistles, and Revelation, students will read the story of how Jesus’ disciples took the good news of God’s grace and forgiveness throughout the world.

1

2

3

Notes to Teachers and Parents:

1 As mentioned in the student edition, Jesus is the Son of Man, God’s Servant, the Messiah, and the Son of God. These names are not progressive in any way. In other words, He was not first the Son of Man and then became the Servant of God who was made the Messiah and finally transformed in some way into the Son of God. Rather, from His birth, Jesus was fully God and fully man. He had come to be God’s Servant while at the same time He was the anointed Messiah from God. Using these names in the unit titles is simply a teaching device that will allow you to explain in detail, one at a time, how Jesus was the essence of all four names. The unit introductions give detailed descriptions of each of these names. In summary, these are the meanings of the four names: 1) Son of Man: Jesus is fully God and fully man. He was incarnated to be a totally human man so He could understand us, be sympathetic toward us, and die for our sins (see Hebrews 2:10-11, 14-18; 4:14-15). 2) God’s Servant: Jesus came not to be served, but to serve (see Mark 10:45). He was the ultimate example of the suffering servant. 3) Messiah: Jesus was the Anointed One, the King, who came to establish His kingdom on earth (see Matthew 6:10; Mark 1:15). 4) Son of God: Jesus was totally divine. He and the Father were One, a claim that was considered to be blasphemy by the Jewish leaders (see John 10:22-33).

4 The covenant of grace of the Old Testament is called the old covenant, and the covenant of grace of the New Testament is called the new covenant. What makes the covenant of grace new? Though it is the same covenant, it is new in two ways: 1) the covenant is fulfilled by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and 2) the covenant is bigger because it extends outward to the whole world rather than just to the Jews. The following is a practical example of what this means. In the early nineteenth century, Noah Webster published his first American dictionary of the English language. Since then, the dictionary has been expanded many times with new words, but even though it is new and revised, it is the same dictionary. God's covenant of grace is like this: it is the same covenant, but as it has grown in scope and completion, its name has changed from old covenant to new covenant.

5 In ancient times, when two parties made a covenant, the custom was that they would cut an animal in half and each person walk through the space between the two pieces. The ritual signified the importance of the covenant. The covenant parties were saying, "If I don't keep my end of the covenant, let it be to me as it was done to these animals." When the LORD made the covenant with Abram, He knew that Abram couldn't keep his end of the covenant. Abram could not worship God perfectly and would continue to sin like all sinful people do. Only God could keep the promises of the covenant perfectly. When God passed through the pieces of Abram's sacrifice in the form of a smoking firepot, the LORD God was saying, "If I don't keep my part of this covenant, let it be to me as the pieces of this sacrifice." Of course, God would keep His covenant promises perfectly because He is God. He didn't ask Abram, however, to walk through the parts of the sacrifice, because God knew that it was impossible for Abram to keep the covenant perfectly. If Abram walked through the sacrifice under these conditions, it would have meant certain death for him.

God renewed the covenant with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. With each renewal of the covenant, its content became larger and its scope reached a greater number of people. When Jesus came, He fulfilled all the requirements of the covenant and secured redemption for His people. From Genesis to Revelation, the covenant of grace is one covenant because throughout the entire Bible it is the same God who established the covenant and because God's people come to Him in the same way: by God's grace through faith.¹

4

5

6

7

Old and New Covenants: How They Are the Same	New Covenant: How It Differs From the Old Covenant
God promises to be the God of His people. ²¹	God extends the scope of the covenant to all the nations. ²²
God promises to be present with His people. ²³	Jesus, Immanuel, comes as the God-Man and dwells among His people. ²⁴
God guarantees the covenant with His own life. ²⁵	Jesus is both the once-for-all perfect sacrifice and the great High Priest. ²⁶
Sin is cleansed through sacrifice.	Unlike animal sacrifices, Jesus died once and paid the penalty for sin. ²⁷
There is no fault with the covenant; the fault lies with the people who are unable to keep the covenant. ²⁸	Old Testament sacrifices were a picture, but Jesus' death is the reality of redemption for God's people. ²⁹
Keeping God's law doesn't save a person, but God expects His people to obey His law. ³⁰	Jesus abolished the aspects of the law (not the moral law) that separated Jew from Gentile. ³¹
Obedience must be from the heart. ³² Closeness with God is part of God's covenant. ³³	There is a final remedy for sin, and forgiveness has been accomplished at the cross. ³⁴
From the beginning, true believers were and still are saved through grace by faith, not by their works. ³⁵	Faith sees Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises and the center of covenantal faith. ³⁶

21. See Exodus 6:7.
22. See Matthew 28:19-20 and Romans 11:11-16.
23. See Exodus 29:45-46, 33:12-17; Hebrews 13:5.
24. See Matthew 1:22-23.
25. See Genesis 15:1-21; Hebrews 6:13-20, 10:5-10.
26. See Romans 6:10; Hebrews 4:14-16, 8:1-6.
27. See Hebrews 10:1-5.
28. See Jeremiah 5:23, 17:1, 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:8-12.
29. See Hebrews 9:11-15.

30. See Exodus 34:10-14; Jeremiah 31:31-34; John 14:15; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14.
31. See Ephesians 2:11-18.
32. See Deuteronomy 6:4-6, 11:18; Psalm 37:31, 40:8; Luke 6:43-45.
33. See Psalm 103:8-14.
34. See Romans 5:6-11.
35. See Romans 4; Ephesians 2:8-9.
36. See John 8:24, 42.

6 The Old Testament sacrifices had two problems. First, they were offered by priests, who were also sinners. Second, the animal sacrifices were only tokens of the reality of the sacrifice that would come in Jesus. These sacrifices lacked the power to exonerate sin (see Hebrews 7:18, 10:11-12). The sacrifices pointed to Jesus, who was the perfect sacrifice. In making an animal sacrifice, the offerer was looking forward to the fulfillment of the covenant found in Jesus.

7 Since Jesus is the goal and end of the covenant promise, anyone who refuses to believe in Him as Son of God and Redeemer is not exhibiting biblical faith. Failure to confess Jesus as God is a denial of Yahweh, God of the Old Testament covenant (see John 8:24, 42).

UNIT I

Jesus, the Son of Man, Has Come . . . To Live Among His People

THEME: Jesus, the Son of Man, is like us in every way, yet so very different.

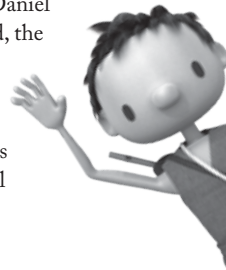
What name do you like to be called? Maybe your name is Elizabeth or Jacob, but you want your friends to call you Liz or Jake. Maybe you like being called Michael or Sophia, but your grandmother insists on calling you Mikey or Sophie. The name you prefer says something about how you see yourself.

Jesus Christ had many names. The name Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means “the LORD saves.” God spoke to the prophet Isaiah and declared that a virgin would have a son named Immanuel meaning “God with us.”¹ Jesus and Immanuel are two of Jesus’ names.

Jesus gave Himself many names, most of them word pictures that taught important truths about who He was, such as “good shepherd,”² “bread of life,”³ “light of the world.”⁴ But the name He used most often to refer to Himself was “Son of Man.”⁵

1

The prophet Daniel wrote about the Son of Man. In a vision, Daniel saw the Son of Man coming in the clouds and standing before God, the Ancient of Days. Then God gave the Son of Man sovereign power and authority over everything, and all the nations worshipped Him. God proclaimed that the Son of Man’s kingdom would endure forever and never be destroyed.⁶ The Son of Man was no less than God Himself—a being worthy to be worshipped and powerful enough to rule the world.



1. See Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23.

2. John 10:11.

3. John 6:35, 48.

4. John 8:12, 9:5.

5. Matthew 8:20, 9:6, 10:23; Mark 2:10; Luke 9:22; John 3:14, 5:27, etc.

6. See Daniel 7.

Notes to Teachers and Parents:

1 All four gospel writers call Jesus the Son of Man, not just once, but many times and on many various occasions. The name “Son of Man” wasn’t just a title that a particular gospel writer used to refer to Jesus but a favorite name that Jesus called Himself.

Jesus identified Himself as the Son of Man whenever He wanted people to know that He was the Savior who would save His people from their sin. The Jewish people associated the name “Son of Man” with the Son of Man written about in Daniel, and when they heard Jesus call Himself by this name, they realized that Jesus thought that He was God.⁷

The name “Son of Man” has a second meaning. Even though Jesus was divine, He was also human. Jesus is the only person ever born who is completely God and completely man. Jesus got hungry, thirsty, and tired. He suffered in all the ways that you suffer. Yet, no matter how much He suffered, He was always obedient to God the Father and He never sinned, not even once! In fact, it was through His suffering that He learned to be obedient.⁸

Jesus chose to be born a man for two reasons. First, He knew that only a perfect man could die for mankind’s sin. Second, He wanted to experience everything that you experience. He knew that if He suffered as you suffer, you would be more likely to trust Him because you would know that He understood you.⁹

Jesus was God walking on earth in a human body with a human spirit. One of the leaders of the early Christian church, Saint Augustine, said, “The Son of God became the Son of Man that you who were the sons of men might be made sons of God.”¹⁰

As the Son of Man, the God-Man, Jesus fulfilled all the promises of the covenant. All throughout the Old Testament, the LORD God had repeated the words, “I will be your God, and you will be My people.” Now God, in the person of Jesus, had come to live among His people.

Jesus, the Son of Man, is just like you because He was a real human person, but He is distinct from you because He is God Himself. This is the Jesus who loves you, lived for you, and died for you. This is the Jesus whose story is told in the gospel books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

7. See Daniel 7:13; John 8:12-59.

8. See Hebrews 5:7-8.

9. See Hebrews 2:10-11, 14-18, 4:15.

10. Brand, Draper, and England, *Holman Bible Dictionary*, p. 1518.

Chapter 1

Jesus in Eternity and Time

THEME: The Son of Man is the eternal God who becomes man.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 1:1-18 Luke 1:1-4, 3:23-38 John 1:1-14

MEMORY PASSAGE: Matthew 1:22-23

KEY FACTS:

The Four Gospels

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
4 Jesus is...	The Messiah	God's Servant	Son of Man	Son of God
5 Audience	Jews	Gentiles/Romans	Gentiles/Greeks	Believers
8 Emphasis	Jesus' words	Jesus' actions	Jesus' humanity	Jesus' deity
8 Purpose	To show that Jesus is the Messiah, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy	To record the historical events of the good news of salvation	To write an orderly account of Jesus' life so believers would be certain of what they have been taught	To record Jesus' signs so people would believe that Jesus is the Christ and have life through Him
9 Key Words	Kingdom of heaven, Son of David, fulfilled	Immediately	Son of Man, praising God	Believe, know, My Father, glorify, life
11 Key Verse	Matthew 1:22-23	Mark 10:45	Luke 19:10	John 20:31
12 Uniqueness	Fulfilled prophecy	Detailed stories	Chronological order	"I am" statements
13				
15				

PROPHECY FULFILLED:

In the Old Testament, there were prophets, priests, and kings. Jesus Christ fulfills Old Testament prophecy by being the perfect Prophet (see Matthew 7:28-29), Priest (see John 1:29), and King (see Matthew 21:1-11).



from Jerusalem. Most scholars believe that Mark received information from the Apostle Peter, writing the story from Peter's perspective. Scholars generally agree that Luke wrote both the Gospel According to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. Luke wrote his gospel from the Apostle Paul's perspective. Luke, a physician, traveled with Paul on his missionary journeys (see Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11). As Paul's companion and an eyewitness on Paul's trips, Luke had time to talk to Paul and learn from him. These discussions provided Luke with the knowledge necessary to write his books. One way we know that Luke was with Paul on some of his journeys is that Luke indirectly tells us he was with Paul by writing the sections of Acts in the first person. For example, in Acts 16, Luke switches from writing in third person (e.g., "Paul and his companions" in Acts 16:6-10) to writing in the first person using the pronoun "we" (see Acts 16:11-40), indicating that he was with Paul during this part of the trip. We see this first-person writing again in Acts 20-21. A careful historian, Luke recorded the facts in chronological order. The Apostle John wrote the Gospel According to John.

4 The Hebrew word "Messiah" means "anointed one" or king. The Old Testament prophets prophesied that the Messiah would come as Israel's deliverer (see Isaiah 9:6-7, 11:1-5; Obadiah 1:15, 17, 21; Zechariah 9:9; Micah 5:2). The Jews were looking for a political leader to overthrow the Roman government. By contrast, the Messiah about whom the prophets spoke was a spiritual leader who would deliver the people from their sin. Because Matthew wrote to Jews who knew the Old Testament prophecies, he emphasized how Jesus was the fulfillment of these prophecies. As your students read the stories from Matthew, ask them to look for two things: 1) fulfillments of Old Testament prophecy, and 2) stories that emphasize the kingly aspects of Jesus. For example, the story of the Magi's visit in Matthew 2:1-11 is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Psalm

Notes to Teachers and Parents:

1 Each chapter of *God's Great Covenant, New Testament 1* will harmonize the gospels and list all the parallel Scripture passages that make up the story. In some chapters, the narrative on the Story Time pages comes from portions of all four gospels. In other chapters, the narrative may come from only one gospel. Most of the events in the synoptic gospels will be addressed by all three synoptic gospel writers, although each of the synoptic writers (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) has some unique material. The Apostle John relates events and words from Jesus that none of the other gospel writers include. The purpose of this text box in each chapter is to provide all the Scripture passages that fall within the scope of the chapter narrative.

2 As you may have noted in the table of contents, at the end of each unit is a Memory Passage Worksheet that provides exercises for the memorization passages covered in all of the chapters in the unit.

3 Four men wrote four accounts of Jesus' life. The Gospel According to Matthew was written by Matthew, one of the twelve disciples. Matthew, also known as Levi the tax collector, recorded the story of his call to follow Jesus in Matthew 9:9-13. The Gospel According to Mark was written by John Mark, the son of Mary, one of Jesus' followers

72:10-11 and a scriptural example of Jesus in His office of King. The Prophecy Fulfilled portion of the Memory Page provides a few of over 100 Old Testament prophecies that Jesus fulfilled through His birth, life, death, and resurrection. As your students read through the four gospels, urge them to look for additional fulfilled prophecies.

5 Mark did not write about Jesus' conception, birth, or genealogy. He began immediately with Jesus' baptism and temptation. The gospel of Mark is an action-packed, fast-paced narrative, leading up to the greatest act of compassion of God's Servant—His death on the cross. All of Jesus' actions showed a submission to the will of the Father and a compassion for people. The Romans were a no-nonsense, active people, and Mark wanted to communicate to them that Jesus was a victorious conqueror, not because He wielded power and strength (though He did have divine power), but because He humbled Himself and took on the role of a servant.

6 Luke emphasized that Jesus was the Son of Man because he wanted his readers to see the full humanity of Jesus. He gave more details than any of the other writers about Jesus' birth and childhood. He emphasized Jesus' concern for children and recorded more stories about women than the other writers. Because Luke was a physician, he mentioned medical details that were absent in the other gospels.

7 John's emphasis was to present the story in such a way that people would read about Jesus' miracles ("signs") and believe that He was divine.

8 Matthew recorded six of Jesus' extended sermons, or discourses. Matthew 5-7 contains the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 10 words spoken before Jesus sent out the twelve disciples, Matthew 13 kingdom parables, Matthew 18 other parables, Matthew 23 warnings to the Pharisees, and Matthew 24-25 signs of the end times. Matthew also recorded more parables than any of the other gospel writers.

Jesus in Eternity and Time

Think back before Jesus was born, back before King David ruled or Moses crossed the Red Sea. Think back before Abraham or Noah lived or Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. Think back before the beginning of time when nothing existed, and there was only blackness.

"In the beginning was the Word."¹ With these words, the Apostle John began the story of Jesus' life. It is clear that John carefully chose these words because the word "Word" has a significant meaning, both in English and in Greek, the original language of the New Testament. The Greek word for "word" is *logos*, which means "an explanation or reason for something otherwise meaningless."² As the Word, Jesus brought greater understanding of who God was.

The Jews believed that God's Word, or the Scripture, was more than just wise, religious instruction. Behind God's Word was a divine power and an ability to accomplish God's purposes that human words couldn't have.³ When the Apostle John called Jesus the Word (*Logos*), he was communicating two important truths. First, he was declaring that Jesus Christ was God Himself through whom all things were created and by whom all things have life.³ He was the Word who made things happen when He spoke! Second, John was proclaiming that Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, became a man so that, as the Word, He could communicate to mankind who God is.

Prophet:

Jesus is the Word who shows people who God is.

"The Word became flesh."⁴ These words of John's are a declaration of Jesus' humanity. His statement was clear: the divine Son of God was human in every way so that mankind could see God's glory. What does that mean? It means that God, in the person of Jesus Christ, became a man so that people on earth could understand a little better what God is like. God is a spirit who has limitless power, wisdom, love, and justice. Because of these characteristics, God is too big for ordinary people like us to comprehend. So, Jesus, the God-Man—deity wrapped up in a human body—brought God in all His perfection down to earth. He showed us God's power, wisdom, love, and justice during His time here.

1. John 1:1.

2. Brand, Draper, and England, *Holman Bible Dictionary*, 1044-1045.

3. See Colossians 1:15-20.

4. John 1:14.

9 Luke clearly stated his purpose in writing his gospel in Luke 1:1-4.

10 The Apostle John stated his reason for writing his gospel in John 20:31: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

11 Matthew used words that would be familiar to Jews. He said "kingdom of heaven" (see Matthew 3:2, 4:17, etc.) instead of "kingdom of God" because Jews avoided speaking or writing the name of God. He called Jesus the "Son of David" (see Matthew 1:1, 9:27, etc.), emphasizing the royal lineage between King David and Jesus. The LORD promised David in 2 Samuel 7:11-16 that his kingdom would endure forever. Jesus' kingdom is the fulfillment of that promise.

12 Mark wrote in a concise, straight-to-the-point style, yet at the same time he included story details that the other synoptic gospels chose not to mention.

13 The events in the synoptic gospels are not presented in the same chronological order. It is generally believed that Luke's order of events is the most chronological. The fact that events in the three gospels are in a different order doesn't mean that the gospels contain errors. Rather, the differences can be explained by the authors' purposes. God is

Comparison of the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John

Matthew, Mark, and Luke	John
Stories about the Galilean ministry	Stories about the Judean ministry
Jesus' public speeches (parables/long speeches)	Jesus' private conversations with His disciples
What Jesus did (miracles/speeches)	Who Jesus was ("I am" passages)
Events included in other gospels	Events not included in other gospels

The four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) tell you everything you need to know about the historical man named Jesus. Yet, these books do not fit the usual definition of a biography, because they only relate certain parts of Jesus' life. Through God's Spirit, the authors wrote down the events that would explain God's covenant to His people and would complete the story of redemption begun in Genesis 3. Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament covenant.

The Bible has four accounts of Jesus' life. Three of the accounts (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are called the synoptic gospels because they generally present the same information in a similar manner. (The word "synoptic" means "to see in a similar way" and the word "gospel" means "good news.") The Gospel of John contains stories that the other three gospels generally do not have.

Genealogies:

A genealogy is an account of a person's ancestors. The genealogy of Jesus Christ established two things:

1. Jesus had a human ancestry.
2. Jesus had a royal lineage as the descendant of King David.

The genealogy given in Matthew 1:1-17 emphasizes Jesus' royalty. It traces Jesus' ancestors from Abraham to King David through the line of kings to Joseph, the husband of Mary. It is interesting to note that even though Joseph was not Jesus' father by birth (the Holy Spirit was the Father of Jesus), Joseph, Jesus' adopted father, was from the royal line of David. In the genealogy in Matthew 1, Matthew mentions three women: Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth. Luke's genealogy in Luke 3:23-38 traces Mary's lineage and emphasizes Jesus' humanity and goes backwards to Adam. Through Luke's genealogy, we learn that Jesus is blood-related to King David through His mother Mary.

the Author of all Scripture (see 2 Peter 1:20-21), and He worked through the individual personalities of the gospel writers to accomplish the purpose that He designed for each gospel. Each author's sequence of events fits into that unique purpose.

14 John recorded Jesus' "I am" discourses. In each discourse, Jesus gave a metaphor that explained some aspect of who He is, such as "I am the bread of life" in John 6:35, "I am the light of the world" in John 9:5, "I am the good shepherd" in John 10:11, "I am the resurrection and the life" in John 11:25, and "I am the way and the truth and the life" in John 14:6. The Jews, particularly the Pharisees who knew the Scripture well, would associate these names with deity, remembering the LORD's name for Himself at the burning bush: "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14). This name became known as the tetragrammaton because it was written in four Hebrew letters (*YHWH*). Adding vowels to the tetragrammaton results in the word "Yahweh," which is God's covenant name.

15 In the Old Testament, there were three leadership positions: prophet, priest, and king. The *prophet* communicated God's words to God's people. The words might be words of instruction, blessing, or judgment. Some prophets predicted events that were going to happen in the future. *Priests* were anointed by the LORD to offer sacrifices for sin and to lead the people in ceremonial worship. Two prophets (Samuel and Ezekiel) were both prophets and priests. In the same manner as the prophets and priests, *kings* were anointed

by God and had the responsibility of civil rule over the nation. (Some of the kings of Israel and Judah assumed rule through conspiracy, murder, and treachery rather than divine appointment.) No one in the Old Testament, however, ever held all three roles. Jesus Christ is the only one who ever was or will be Prophet, Priest, and King. Jesus was the Prophet who amazed His hearers with the power and authority of His words. He was divine and spoke divine words. Jesus was the Priest who offered the once-for-all perfect sacrifice for the sins of mankind—His own life (see John 1:29, 10:11). Finally, He was King. The people hailed Him as king when He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey (see Matthew 21:1-11), and the Romans soldiers mocked Him by putting a crown of thorns on His head and nailing a placard above His head saying, "This is Jesus the king of the Jews" (Matthew 27:37). The people misunderstood the nature of Jesus' kingship and the Romans ridiculed Him, but Jesus Christ demonstrated by His death and resurrection that He was the sovereign King who deserves worship. Throughout this text, story bubbles will identify examples of Jesus as Prophet, Priest, and King as they appear in the gospel story. These three roles define what Jesus did for us as our Savior, and understanding their meaning enriches our relationship with Him.

16 In Genesis 1 God spoke, and by the power of His words, each part of creation happened just as God said it should be. Everything He made was good.

17 Jesus spoke, and people were healed (see Matthew 8-9), storms ceased (see Luke 8:22-25), demons were cast out (see Luke 8:26-39), a few small loaves of bread and a couple fish fed a multitude (see Matthew 14:13-21), and people's sins were forgiven (see Luke 5:17-26). People were amazed with what they identified as a "new teaching" and questioned how it was that Jesus could speak with such authority that even the evil spirits obeyed His orders (see Mark 1:27-28). Jesus was God, and when He spoke, things happened.

18 The distinguishing factors listed in this chart are generalizations. In general, the synoptics relate stories of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, but they also have some stories that take place in Judea. The events of John's gospel primarily take place in Judea, particularly in Jerusalem, but John does write about the feeding of the 5,000 that occurred in Galilee near Capernaum. Each of these distinctions helps us understand what God's purpose was for each gospel and what unique message God was communicating through the gospel writers about who Jesus is and what His mission was.

19 Because Matthew wrote to the Jews and the Jews did not speak the name of God out loud, Matthew referred to God's kingdom as the kingdom of heaven. None of the other gospels use this phrase for God's kingdom. Luke's emphasis on Jesus' humanity means that he called Jesus the Son of Man more often than any of the other gospel writers. The word "immediately" appears in Mark's gospel because he wanted to communicate that Jesus, God's Servant, actively and promptly responded to the sufferings and cares of people. In John's gospel, Jesus refers to God the Father as "My Father," more often (twenty times in twenty-one chapters) than any of the other gospel writers. This intimate address by Jesus is consistent with John's emphasis on Jesus as the Son of God. (The Apostle Matthew also used the words "My Father" frequently—thirteen times in twenty-eight chapters.) These are some of the ways in which God worked through the gospel writers to tailor their presentations to the cultures of their intended audiences.

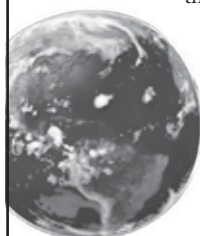
20 The gospels do not conflict with each other. The different order of events and different details show how God had a different purpose in mind for each of the gospel accounts. Telling the story in a chronological sequence did not serve God's purpose for each of the gospels. Four gospel accounts, not just one, were written for a divine

Each gospel writer wrote to a different group of people and had a different purpose. Each author chose to write about a different set of events (although there are similarities in the synoptics), and the word choices they made vary from book to book. Sometimes the chronological order of the events may differ and the specific details of the stories may seem to conflict, but each of the accounts is historically accurate and completely true.

King:
Jesus was born from the royal line of King David.

Matthew and Luke record the genealogy of Jesus. Though these lists of names may seem hard to pronounce and boring to read, they tell you that Jesus was born as a Jew, from the royal line of David, in the covenant family of Abraham, and as the fulfillment of prophecy. So, in God's perfect time, Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, Messiah the King, was born.

In the Bible, God has given us four written gospels accounts, but there is actually only one story and one gospel message. We know that the word "gospel" comes from a Greek word that means "good news." What is God's good news? It is this: the almighty, perfectly holy God wants to live in relationship with sinful mankind and has provided a way to do that through Jesus Christ.



Every person has sinned and that sin separates him from God.⁵ That sin cannot be ignored; it must be judged and punished. In His great mercy, God became man in the person of Jesus Christ and, after living a life of perfect obedience, Jesus died on the cross, taking on Himself the punishment for sin that His people justly deserved. Three days after dying on the cross, Jesus rose again from the dead, proving His victory over death. God forgives all those who ask Him for forgiveness and who have faith and trust in Jesus as their Savior and Lord. That's the gospel—that's God's good news for mankind!

"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." (Galatians 4:4-5)

⁵ See Romans 3:21-26.

reason, and God worked through the authors to put together four narratives that served four purposes. Also, each writer saw events from his own perspective so the details each one chose to write about may be different.

21 God's purpose for the gospels, and indeed the entire Scripture, is to bring the good news of salvation to sinful mankind. What is the gospel? In summary, mankind had a problem and God provided the solution. The problem was that Adam and Eve, the first two people created by God, chose to disobey God (see Genesis 3; Romans 5:12-13). Their actions brought sin into God's perfect world, and since then, every person has been born as a sinner and acts as one (see Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:10-23). This sin not only separates people from God, but it demands justice from Him (see Romans 3:21-26) and elicits His wrath (see Romans 1:18). Because God is perfectly holy and just, He can't simply ignore sin and pretend it didn't happen. Because everyone is a sinner, no human person is able to pay the penalty for his own, or anyone else's, sin. Only a sinless person could qualify as a redeemer. The solution to mankind's problem is that God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, was born as a human being (see John 1:14), lived a perfectly sinless life (see Hebrews 5:7-10), and died on the cross to satisfy the just requirements of the righteous God (see Romans 5:6-9). Jesus' death made it possible for mankind to be forgiven of sin and to live in relationship with God. All who come to God with a humble spirit and a

Review Worksheets

A. KEY FACTS:

1. In the space provided, write the letter(s) that represents the name of the gospel each phrase best describes.

MT = Matthew MK = Mark L = Luke J = John

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| <u>MK</u> a. Written to the Romans | <u>L</u> b. Jesus as Son of Man |
| <u>L</u> c. Written to the Greeks | <u>MT</u> d. Emphasizes Jesus' words |
| <u>MK</u> e. Jesus as God's Servant | <u>L</u> f. Chronological order |
| <u>J</u> g. Key words: believe, know | <u>MT</u> h. Jesus as Messiah |
| <u>MT</u> i. Written to Jews | <u>MK</u> j. Key word: immediately |
| <u>L</u> k. Emphasizes Jesus' humanity | <u>MT</u> l. Fulfilled prophecy |

2. Fill in the blanks:

- a. The word "synoptic" means "to see in a similar way".
- b. The word "gospel" means "good news".

B. STORY FACTS: Circle T if the sentence is true and F if it is false.

- | | | |
|--|----------|----------|
| 1. The Greek word <i>logos</i> means "light." | T | <u>F</u> |
| 2. The synoptic gospels emphasize Jesus' Galilean ministry. | <u>T</u> | F |
| 3. A genealogy is a list of a person's ancestors. | <u>T</u> | F |
| 4. All the gospel events are historically accurate and true. | <u>T</u> | F |
| 5. The gospels fit the usual definition of a biography. | T | <u>F</u> |
| 6. The Gospel of John is one of the synoptic gospels. | T | <u>F</u> |

C. TWO IMPORTANT PHRASES FROM JOHN 1:

Answer the following questions.

1. What phrase declares that Jesus Christ is God (John 1:1)?

The phrase "and the Word was God" declares that Jesus Christ is God.

2. What phrase states clearly that Jesus was also a man (John 1:14)?

The phrase "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" clearly states that Jesus was also a man.

repentant heart (see Psalm 51:16-17), asking for forgiveness of their sin, will receive God's gracious forgiveness (see 1 John 1:9). This is the good news of God's gospel.

Please note that the underlying premise of the *God's Great Covenant* curriculum is that the Bible is God's inspired truth and that Jesus Christ is the only way to receive salvation and eternal life with God. The assumption of the author is that those using this curriculum are believers who have made a personal commitment to the Lord Jesus. In light of that assumption, the practical application of scriptural truth and the devotional elements of the curriculum address the students as though they are believers. As teachers and parents, you may want to present the gospel to your children/students at the beginning of this course and then remind them periodically throughout the year that being a Christian necessitates that each person come to Jesus in a personal way.

22 Student responses will vary. Once students have had enough time to share their thoughts and questions, discuss the following information with them. If Jesus was not our Prophet, Priest, and King, we would have no hope. How does Jesus fill the roles of Prophet, Priest, and King? Throughout the curriculum, there will be text boxes in the margins of the chapters that give examples of Jesus in these three roles, but here are brief explanations of what these roles mean. **King:** The job of a king is to rule over his kingdom righteously and to exercise his authority justly. Jesus is the ultimate King who rules over heaven and earth (see Daniel 4:34-35). He has absolute control, and His Word is the absolute authority. Jesus lovingly and carefully governs the world, and His children can be confident that life is never out of control and that God works all things for the good of His people (see Romans 8:28). Even when human authority figures abuse their God-given authority, God takes care of His children and ultimately will execute justice to all who do not repent of their sin. **Priest:** The job of a priest is to offer sacrifices for sin and to act as an intermediary between a holy God and sinful men. As Priest, Jesus is both the sacrifice that pays the penalty for sin (see Hebrews 10:11-18; Romans 5:6-8) and the high priest that is the mediator between God and His people (see Hebrews 4:14-16, 10:19-22; 1 Timothy 2:5-6). Because Jesus is the Great High Priest, repentant people can come to Him and have their sin forgiven. All God's children can boldly approach God in prayer and know that they will be heard. Intimacy and fellowship with God is possible because of what Jesus did as Priest. **Prophet:** The job of a prophet is to be a spokesman, bringing God's word to the world. As Prophet, Jesus is the Word of God incarnate (see John 1:1, 9-10). Not only did He preach about the necessity of repentance as the means of becoming part of God's kingdom (see Mark 1:14-15), but He also, through His very being,

D. TWO DIFFERENT GENEALOGIES:

- What are the differences between the genealogies in the books of Matthew and Luke? Provide the answers by filling in the blanks.

Matthew 1:1-17

- The first person in Matthew's genealogy is Abraham and the last is Joseph.
- Matthew's genealogy emphasizes that Jesus is King.

Luke 3:23-38

- The first person in Luke's genealogy is Joseph and the last is Adam.
- Luke's genealogy emphasizes that Jesus is man.

- What three women are mentioned in Matthew's genealogy?
Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth.
- What four things do the genealogies tell you about who Jesus is?
a. He is an ancestor of King David.
b. He was born a Jew.
c. He comes from the covenant family of Abraham.
d. He fulfilled prophecy.

E. IMPORTANT TRUTH—JESUS IS PROPHET, PRIEST, AND KING:

Fill in the blanks provided with one of the following words: **Prophet, Priest, King.**

Jesus

1. Because He rules over the whole world, Jesus is the perfect King.
(Revelation 19:15-16)

2. Because He died for His people's sin, Jesus is the perfect Priest.
(Hebrews 5:8-10)

3. Because He spoke God's words, Jesus is the perfect Prophet.
(Hebrews 1:1-2)

22

F. THINK ABOUT IT: What does it mean to you that Jesus is your Prophet, Priest, and King?

Answers will vary.

communicates who God is and what God expects of His children. He spoke with an authority that amazed and concerned His listeners (see Matthew 7:28-29; Luke 20:1-8). Every word Jesus spoke is truth and every promise He made, He will keep.

Chapter 2

Three Angelic Messages

THEME: The Son of Man is fully God and fully man.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 1:18-25a Luke 1:5-79

MEMORY PASSAGE: John 1:1-2

KEY FACTS:

Three Angelic Messages

	Zechariah	Mary	Joseph
Angel's Message	"You will have a son who will turn people back to the LORD." ¹	"You will have a son from the Holy Spirit." ⁵	"Marry Mary because her child is God's Son." ¹⁰
Person's Response	Unbelief: "How can I be sure of this?" ²	Faith: "I am the LORD's servant." ⁶	Obedience: He obeyed God. ¹¹
The Fulfilled Prophecy	"I will send the prophet Elijah before the day of the LORD comes." ³	"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son." ⁷	"Call Him Immanuel." ¹² "He will redeem His people from sin." ¹³
The Child's Name	John: "The LORD is gracious" ⁴	Jesus: "The LORD Saves" ⁸ "Son of the Most High" ⁹	Jesus: "The LORD Saves" ¹⁴ Immanuel: "God with us" ¹⁵

PROPHECY FULFILLED:

A prophet was a person chosen by God to speak God's words to His people. There were two tests of a true prophet:

1. A prophet's words never contradicted what God had said in the past.
2. When a prophet talked about the future, his prophecies always came true.

Malachi and Isaiah were true prophets, and Jesus was the true Prophet.

1. See Luke 1:11-17.

2. See Luke 1:18.

3. See Malachi 4:5.

4. Barker, *NIV Study Bible*, 1535. John is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Yohanan, which means "the LORD is gracious."

5. See Luke 1:31-35.

6. Luke 1:38.

7. Isaiah 7:14.

8. Barker, *NIV Study Bible*, 1422. Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means "the LORD saves."

9. Barker, *NIV Study Bible*, 1422; Luke 1:32.

10. See Matthew 1:20-21.

11. See Matthew 1:24.

12. See Isaiah 7:14.

13. See Psalm 130:8.

14. Barker, *NIV Study Bible*, 1422.

15. Barker, *NIV Study Bible*, 1027. See Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23.

if the prophet was from Him. First, the prophet could never contradict God's commands or tell the people to do something that the LORD had forbidden (see Deuteronomy 13:1-5). Primary among God's commands was worshipping God alone and not worshipping any other gods. Second, if a prophet spoke a message that he said was from the LORD and what he said did not happen, the people were to consider that prophet a false prophet (see Deuteronomy 18:14-22). This test could be problematic, since many of the prophecies were not fulfilled during the prophet's life. The people were encouraged, though, to scrutinize carefully the prophet's words to discover any obvious discrepancies between his words and real events. The life of Jesus was a continual fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The key facts chart of this lesson has three examples of fulfilled prophecy. As students study the gospels, they will examine many more.

2 Malachi and Isaiah were both true prophets because they never contradicted anything that God had previously said and because their prophecies always came true. The prophecies mentioned in this chapter are examples of their prophecies that were spoken centuries earlier and in New Testament times were coming to pass as exactly as they had been proclaimed. In Jesus' role as Prophet, He spoke only God's truth. His words often angered his hearers, particularly the religious leaders, and made them hostile toward Him, but everything that Jesus said concerning Himself, the Father, His coming death, and the temple, all happened exactly as He said.

Notes for Teachers and Parents:

1 There were many prophets, and some prophetesses, in the Old Testament. Moses was the first prophet who wrote down what God said to him. He communicated God's word to Israel and was the mediator between the Israelites and God. Samuel occupied an unusual place in Old Testament history because he was both a prophet who spoke for God and a priest who offered sacrifices for the people's sins. (Ezekiel was also both prophet and priest, but he didn't fulfill those responsibilities at the same time. He was a priest in Judah before he was taken into captivity. In captivity, he could no longer offer sacrifices, but the LORD appointed him as prophet to the exiles to comfort and encourage them.) Samuel was instrumental in beginning schools for prophets so that by the time the monarchy was established in Israel, there were many prophets. The LORD used the prophets to relate His will to the kings of Israel and Judah. When the kings listened to the prophets, the prophets were a source of spiritual help and encouragement. Too often, though, the wicked kings who had turned away from the LORD and His covenant promises regarded the prophets as a threat. They didn't want to hear their messages. The prophets were persecuted and often killed. The prophets had two kinds of messages: words to heed in the present and predictions of events to occur in the future. Not all prophets were true prophets. In Deuteronomy, the LORD gave two tests by which the people could determine

Three Angelic Messages

3 The New International Version calls this priest Zechariah, while the King James Version uses the name Zacharias. Zacharias is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Zechariah. The name means “Yahweh remembered.” (Brand, Draper, and England, *Holman Bible Dictionary*, 1698.)

4 The priests in Israel were divided into twenty-four courses, or groups, living throughout the land of Palestine. Zechariah was from the priestly division of Abijah. Each course served twice during the year. When its designated week arrived, the course would send some of its contingent of priests to Jerusalem to serve one week in the temple. The priests decided who would do the various duties for the morning and evening sacrifices by casting lots. Although a priest could perform certain ceremonial duties more than once, the honor of burning incense in the Holy Place was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Some priests could serve their entire lifetime and never have the lot fall to them. The chosen priest selected two assistants from among the other priests to accompany him. One assistant carried the burning coals and the other held the golden censer filled with incense. After the assistants had arranged the coals and incense, they left the Holy Place, and the priest who remained (the one chosen by lot) burned the incense on the altar of incense and prayed for the people. On the day that the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah, he was the one who had been chosen by lot to offer the incense, and as he performed this ceremonial rite, alone in the Holy Place, Gabriel appeared to him. (Edersheim, *The Temple*, 83, 157–167.)

5 Zechariah and Elizabeth observed all of the LORD’s commandments and regulations blamelessly. Blameless does not mean sinless; it means upright with a heart devoted to worshipping the LORD. Zechariah had the added blessing that his wife was also born into the priestly family of Aaron.

3 With reverence and some uneasiness, the old priest Zechariah entered the Holy Place with his two assistants. Only once in a lifetime could a priest offer incense in the temple, and after all these years of serving as a priest, today the lot had finally fallen to Zechariah. His assistants laid the burning coals on the altar, arranged the incense, and withdrew. He was alone in the Holy Place to offer prayers for the people, and he stood still in awe.



4 Then, without a sound, the angel Gabriel appeared beside the altar. The dim sanctuary shimmered with heavenly radiance, and the old priest, shaken and afraid, fell trembling to the floor.¹⁶

“Don’t be afraid,” the angel said. “The LORD has heard your prayer. Your wife Elizabeth will have a son, and you will call him John. This son will be a joy to you, and in the spirit of Elijah, he will turn many people back to the LORD their God.”¹⁷ (The name John means “the LORD is gracious.”)

5 How could Zechariah be certain of this? He knew his wife was too old to have a child. He was a man of faith, upright and blameless before the LORD, but this couldn’t be true!¹⁸ He couldn’t believe that he would have a son who would be the fulfillment of the prophet Malachi’s words: “See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me.”¹⁹ The angel was telling him that his son would be the one to announce the coming of the Messiah.¹⁹ Because Zechariah had questioned Gabriel’s message, Gabriel rebuked Zechariah, saying, “Because you did not believe, you will be unable to speak until your son is born.”²⁰ Silent and humbled, Zechariah returned home. Not long after, Elizabeth became pregnant.

6 In Nazareth, a village in Galilee, the angel Gabriel made another surprise visit, this time to a young unmarried woman named Mary. “You are highly favored by God,” he said. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and you will have a child. He will be called the Son of God. And your relative Elizabeth is having a child in her old age.”²¹ Gabriel told Mary about Elizabeth as a sign to confirm that all that he had said to her was true.

16. See Luke 1:8–12.

19. See Malachi 4:5–6.

17. See Luke 1:13–17.

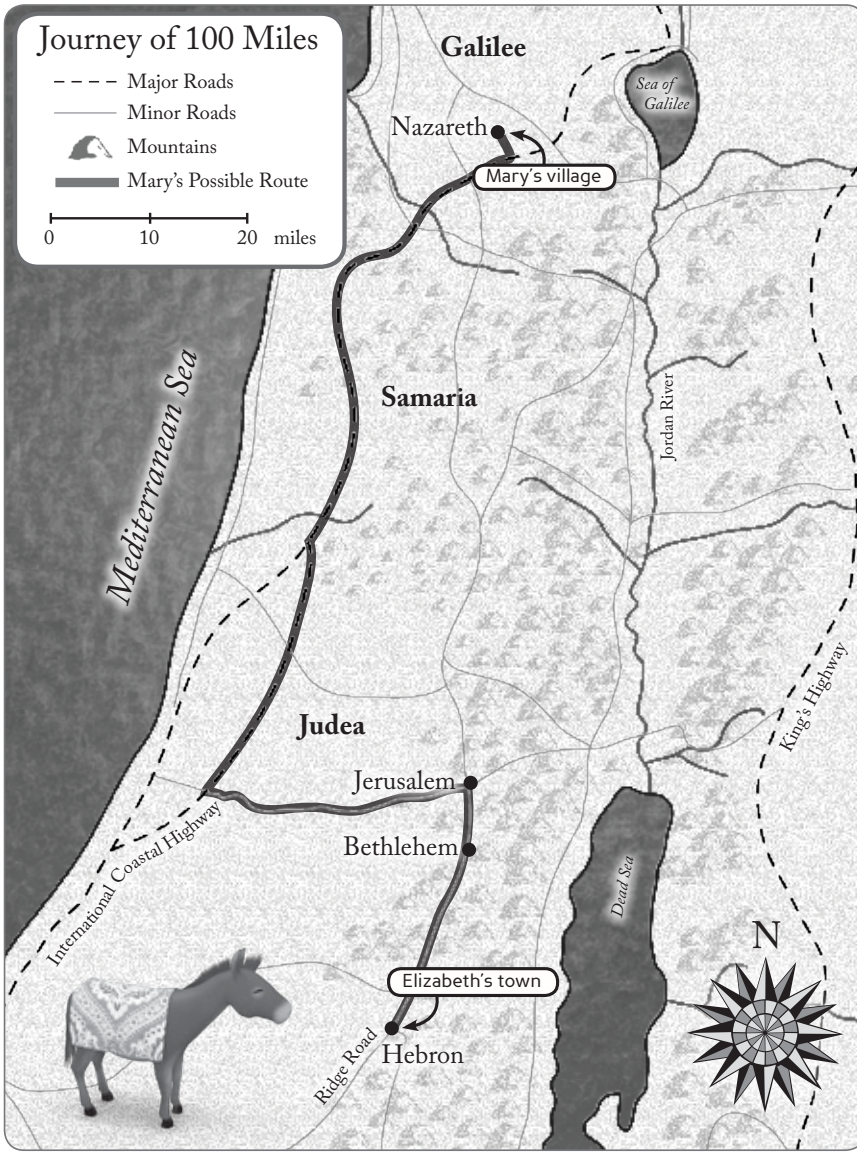
20. See Luke 1:19–20.

18. Malachi 3:1.

21. See Luke 1:29–37.

6 Zechariah’s initial response was unbelief; he wanted some kind of sign from God because he didn’t believe the angel’s words. Gabriel rebuked him. Because Gabriel stood in the presence of God and spoke on behalf of God Himself, his words should have been sufficient for Zechariah to believe him. Asking for a sign in unbelief is rejecting God’s word. Zechariah’s muteness was to be a reminder of his initial unbelief. After he returned home and Elizabeth became pregnant, these two faithful servants of the Lord believed the words of the angel. Zechariah’s reaction after the baby’s birth shows that God had awakened faith in him (see Luke 1:62–67). Zechariah believed God and, in obedience, he named his son John as the angel Gabriel had told him to do (see Luke 1:63).

7 Because Mary had faith, Gabriel responded differently to her than he had to Zechariah. In unbelief, Zechariah asked the angel Gabriel for a sign, and Gabriel rebuked Zechariah for his unbelief. In contrast, Mary’s question did not come from a heart of unbelief, but from a willing spirit and a desire for greater understanding. Although Mary didn’t ask for a sign, Gabriel chose to give her one so she would know that he spoke the truth. The sign was the message that her elderly relative, Elizabeth, was with child.



8 When Mary asked the question, “How will this be?” (Luke 1:34), she was not expressing unbelief. Rather, she was saying, “I believe. Help me understand how this is going to happen.” Even though she was puzzled about how God would accomplish His purpose, Mary was willing to surrender herself totally to the Lord.

9 It is uncertain where Zechariah and Elizabeth lived. Some Bible scholars strongly suggest that they lived in Hebron, south of Jerusalem, based upon Joshua 21:9-11. Others say they lived in a small village eight to ten miles to the west of Jerusalem. What we do know is that they lived in the hill country in Judea. Regardless, this was a trip of at least 100 miles for Mary. For instructional purposes, the map on page 43 of this chapter uses Hebron in order to have a specific end point for Mary’s journey.

10 We don’t know for certain the purpose of Mary’s visit, but the gospel account tells us that both women were encouraged and comforted by it. Mary rejoiced with Elizabeth over her joyous news, and she received spiritual encouragement from this godly older woman. Elizabeth was blessed to know that Mary was to be the mother of the Messiah and was honored that Mary had sought out her company and spiritual wisdom. This glad meeting was the setting for Mary’s song of praise, the Magnificat (see Luke 1:46-55).

11 In ancient Israel, being engaged (betrothed, pledged to be married) was as binding as marriage. Once a couple was betrothed to each other, only a legal divorce could sever the relationship, even though the couple had never lived together as husband and wife. Joseph was a righteous man, and he loved this godly young woman he was pledged to marry. He didn’t understand the circumstances behind Mary’s pregnancy and had no desire to shame her publicly, yet since infidelity during the betrothal period was punishable by death, he was obligated to divorce her. If he

Mary was troubled at these words, but replied, “I am the LORD’s servant.”²² Though she wondered how she could have a child without a husband, Mary knew that nothing was impossible with God. If God said she would have a child whose father was God, Mary would believe Him.

Mary hurried to visit Elizabeth in the hill country of Judea.⁹ At the first sound of Mary’s voice, Elizabeth’s baby leaped inside her. “Blessed are you among women,” she exclaimed. “Why would I be so honored to have the mother of the LORD visit me?”²³ Laughing and crying at the same time, the two women hugged each other tightly. So much had happened, their lives so suddenly changed, that the old woman and the young maiden found comfort in each other’s company.¹⁰ Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned to Nazareth.

Meanwhile, back in Nazareth, Joseph, a simple carpenter, had promised to marry Mary. When he learned that Mary was going to have a child, he knew that he was not the father. Because he was righteous, Joseph decided to divorce her without much attention so as not to shame her publicly.¹¹

But after he had considered divorcing Mary, an angel of the LORD came to Joseph in a dream. “Don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife,” he said. “Her child is from the Holy Spirit. You must name him Jesus because He will save His people from their sins.”²⁵ Jesus’ birth fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy: “The virgin shall be with child and will give birth to a son, and He will be called Immanuel.”²⁶ Joseph awoke, confident that what the angel had said was true. He married Mary and accepted the awesome responsibility of being stepfather to the Son of God.²⁷

God had given His Son two names. He called Him Jesus because He was a real man who could get hungry, be tired, and bleed when He scraped His knee. He would live and die to provide salvation for His people. God also called Him Immanuel, which means “God with us,” because this fully human man was also fully divine. Jesus, the Son of Man, was God and man come to earth.¹²

Priest:

Jesus’ name means “the LORD saves.” He is the perfect sacrifice for sin.

Three angelic messages, two remarkable sons, and prophecy fulfilled—everything was ready for God’s redemption story to continue. Zechariah’s son was born, and he named him John. The wait for the Messiah was almost over.

22. Luke 1:38.

23. See Luke 1:42-45.

24. See Matthew 1:18-19.

25. See Matthew 1:20-21.

26. See Isaiah 7:14.

27. See Matthew 1:24.

didn’t divorce her, it would be as though he was admitting his guilt, and he would be put to death as well. The angel’s words changed his mind about Mary’s situation. He believed the angel’s words and acted upon them immediately. He was willing to accept whatever challenges, misunderstandings, and hardships that might come as a result of being Mary’s husband and the stepfather of the Son of God.

12 The two names of Jesus communicate two different things. The name Jesus explains Jesus’ purpose in coming to earth: to save His people from sin. The name Immanuel tells us about Jesus’ nature: He is the God who is always with us. Being God incarnate, Jesus came to live among us and be one of us.

Review Worksheets

A. KEY FACTS: There were three different angelic messages that received three different responses. Review what happened by filling in the blanks!

13

Message to Zechariah:

1. Zechariah's response: Unbelief
2. Because of his response, Zechariah couldn't speak until the child was born. When his son was born, Zechariah showed his faith in the LORD in two ways:
 - a. Zechariah called the child John (see Luke 1:62-66).
 - b. In his song of praise, Zechariah made it clear that he knew that his son was the fulfillment of prophecy. His son would be called "prophet of the Most High," who would go on before the LORD to "prepare the way for him" (Luke 1:76).

Message to Mary:

3. Mary's response: Faith
4. Mary's words showed that she believed the angel's words.
Mary said, "I am the LORD's servant" (Luke 1:38). In Mary's song of praise, she said, "My soul magnifies the LORD, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. . . . All generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me" (Luke 1:46-49, NKJV).

Message to Joseph:

5. Joseph's response: Obedience
6. When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel "commanded."
7. Joseph took Mary as his wife. When the child was born, Joseph named Him Jesus (see Matthew 1:24-25).

B. STORY FACTS: Circle *all* the *correct* answers.

1. The name John means "the LORD is gracious" "God with us" "salvation is from the LORD"
2. Mary lived in the village of Nazareth.
Hebron Bethlehem

13 Message to Zechariah: Although Zechariah's initial response was unbelief, he demonstrated in two ways that his heart had changed. First, instead of giving his son a family name, which is what everyone expected, Zechariah obeyed the angel and gave his son the name John. Second, the words of his song of praise show that Zechariah understood and believed that his son had a special place in God's redemptive story. **Message to Mary:** Mary's immediate response was faith. She desired to be a willing servant of the Lord. Her song of praise (called the Magnificat) is theocentric (God-centered), Messianic as she looks toward the future, and covenantal as she remembers God's mercy to His people in the past. She sees her part in this divine drama as that of a humble servant. **Message to Joseph:** Everything we know about Joseph, which is very little, shows him to be a man who obeyed everything that God commanded him to do. Pulled out of his simple, ordinary existence, he accepted without question his unexpected role as stepfather to the Son of God. Every time he met a crisis, he listened to what God told him and acted immediately.

15 Only a totally human person could die for the sins of other people. Romans 5:19 says, “For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.” Only a being that was totally divine could experience the temptations of human life and never sin in His actions or in His heart. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

[illegible]

Memory Page • Story Time • Worksheets

3. The two names God gave His Son were _____ and _____.

Jesus the prophet Elijah Immanuel

4. The prophet _____ said, "I will send my messenger who will prepare the way before me."

Isaiah Malachi Elijah

5. The angel Gabriel told Mary her son would be called the _____.

Son of Man Son of the Most High Son of God

14 C. IMPORTANT TRUTH—JESUS IS GOD AND MAN:

1. Fill in the blanks.

a. Jesus is divine because His father is God (see Matthew 1:20).

b. Jesus is a man because His mother was Mary (see Luke 1:31).

2. Unscramble the words to find out why Jesus is different from every other person who has ever been born.

Jesus Is . . .

ULFLY VINIDE and FYLUL NUHAM
FULLY DIVINE FULLY HUMAN

15 **D. THINK ABOUT IT:** Why is it important that Jesus is both God and man?

Answers will vary.

[illegible][illegible]

Chapter 3

The Birth of Jesus

THEME: The Son of Man has a humble beginning on earth.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:1-38

MEMORY PASSAGE: John 1:3-4

KEY FACTS:

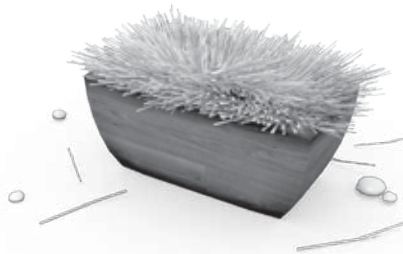
From Heavenly Glory to Earthly Poverty

Jesus in Heaven	Jesus on Earth
His Father was Almighty God.	His stepfather was a poor carpenter.
He lived in heavenly splendor.	He was born in a dirty, smelly cave.
Glorious angels served Him.	Only despised shepherds welcomed him.
He created and owned the whole universe.	His family could only afford two pigeons for a sacrifice.
All creatures in heaven worshipped Him.	His people didn't recognize Him as King.

"For you know the grace of our LORD Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."
(2 Corinthians 8:9)

PROPHECY FULFILLED:

God used a Roman emperor and his royal decree to move Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem to fulfill Micah's prophecy, which said, "But you, Bethlehem . . . out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel" (Micah 5:2)!



Notes to Teachers and Parents:

1 Jesus, in His humility, chose to be born in the poorest of circumstances. The contrast between the glories of heaven and the humiliation of being born in a cave that housed animals is greater than we can comprehend. It wasn't the Jewish royalty or the religious leaders who welcomed Jesus into the world; it was shepherds who spent their lives following sheep from pastureland to pastureland. These men interrupted their lives and put their flocks at possible risk to visit the baby Jesus. Joseph and Mary were so poor that they couldn't even afford the cost of a lamb for the purification sacrifice. The Mosaic Law said that a woman could bring two pigeons if she couldn't afford the requirement of a lamb and a pigeon (see Leviticus 12:1-8). After their trip to Jerusalem for the purification sacrifice, the family returned to Bethlehem and lived in anonymity, and no one in the small town was aware that the Messiah was in their midst.

2 Caesar Augustus's decree to take a census by family line affected every person in the entire Roman Empire. The emperor had no knowledge that his decree would be God's means to move Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem in order to fulfill God's prophecy about the Messiah. The sovereign God used the ruler of the Roman Empire to make His redemptive plan happen exactly as He had planned it.

The Birth of Jesus

In due time, Jesus, the King, the Son of Man, was born, and Micah's prophecy was fulfilled: "But you, Bethlehem . . . out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel."¹ This was a prophecy that only a sovereign God could make happen.

Caesar Augustus, the Roman emperor, decreed that a census be taken throughout the Roman Empire. Because Mary and Joseph were descendents of David,² they had to go to from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register, even though Mary's baby would soon be

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Bethlehem, meaning "house of bread," was six miles southwest of Jerusalem. It was the birthplace of King David. It was a small town, and before Jesus' birth, nothing important had happened there.

born.³ Over mountainous roads, they traveled until they arrived at Bethlehem.⁴ With dust swirling around them, they pushed through the crowded streets. Because of the emperor's decree, Bethlehem had many visitors.

Irritated, noisy people were everywhere. No one noticed the weary couple who were looking for a place for their child to be born.⁵

The innkeeper listened to Joseph's desperate pleas for shelter, and, having nothing else to offer them, he led them to the stable behind the inn. It was only a dirty cave, full of noisy, smelly animals, but it was private. In this cave Jesus was born.⁶

At night in the fields outside Bethlehem, a band of shepherds were watching their sheep.⁷ One moment their eyes were droopy with sleep; the next they were blinking from the brightness of an angel-lit sky. "Don't be afraid. I bring good news," the angel said. "Today a Savior is born in Bethlehem who is Christ the Lord."⁸

Was it true that Christ, the long-awaited Messiah, had been born?⁹ Before they could make sense of these words, many angels filled the sky. Their words resounded through the night air, "Glory to God in the highest. Peace on earth to men on whom His favor rests."¹⁰

Jesus was God's Son, the King of kings, but He wasn't born in a palace or even an ordinary Jewish house. His birth wasn't announced to King Herod or the priests and rulers of the people. No, the Son of Man was born into a poor family in the humblest of circumstances, and the angels sent shepherds, one of the most despised groups of people, to welcome him.

The shepherds didn't question the angels' message. Leaving their flocks unguarded, they hurried to see this marvel. After visiting Mary and the baby Jesus, they praised God and told everyone what they had heard from the angels and had

1. Micah 5:2.

2. See Luke 2:10-11.

3. Luke 2:14.

3 The fact that both Joseph and Mary were descendents from David was a fulfillment of God's covenant promise to David in 2 Samuel 7. God promised David that He would establish David's kingdom forever (see 2 Samuel 7:13), and Jesus, as the King of kings and descendent from David's line, fulfills that promise.

4 The census required that each person register in the town of his or her origin. Joseph was a descendent of David, and so, despite Mary's advanced pregnancy, Joseph was required to travel to Bethlehem to enroll. (Mary did not have to accompany him, but Joseph didn't want to leave her in Nazareth to have her child without him.) How it was that Joseph, a man from the tribe of Judah, lived in Nazareth at this time, we don't know, but we do know that God used the decree by the Roman emperor to move Joseph and Mary from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in order for them to be at the right place at the right time for prophecy to be fulfilled.

5 Because the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem went along the ridges of the Western Mountains, the 100-mile trip involved going up and down rocky, mountainous roads. Bethlehem was over 2,000 feet above sea level, so the last portion of the trip would be a tiring ascent to the walled city.

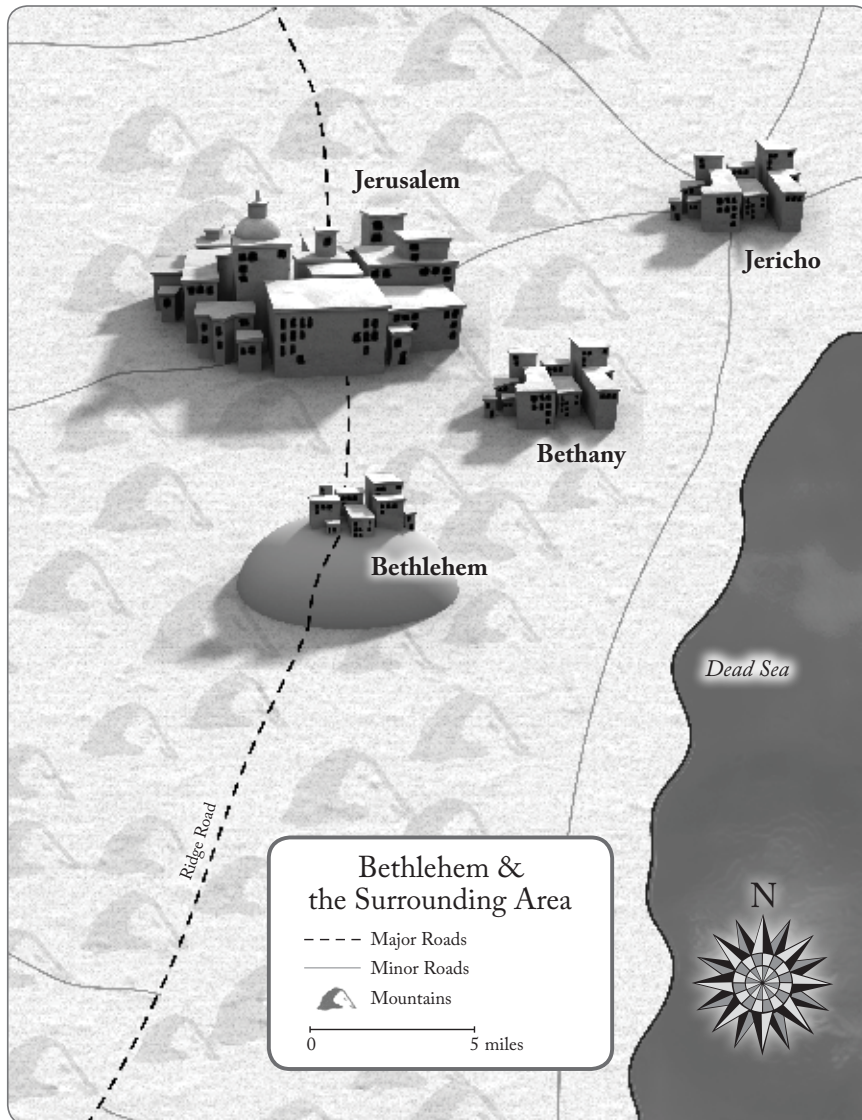
6 Bethlehem was a small town. It couldn't accommodate the overwhelming influx of people arriving to register for the census. The Jews had a high regard for hospitality, and though a small town might have an inn, Jewish families were expected to open their homes to travelers, whether friend or stranger. This census event pushed the village of Bethlehem to its limit, and by the time Joseph and Mary arrived, there simply was no space left.

7 Because of all the manger scenes on Christmas cards and in Bible storybooks, we picture the stable as a structure similar to a small barn and the manger as a wooden trough filled with fresh hay. In reality, however, the stable

probably was a dark, damp cave filled with noisy, smelly animals, and the "manger" may have been a haircloth that held horse feed. This was hardly the ideal place to birth a child. (Ryle, *Expository Thoughts: Luke*, 54-55.)

8 We don't know for certain in which month Jesus was born. Some people say that Jesus couldn't have been born in December because shepherds wouldn't be keeping flocks outside in the winter. In the fields surrounding Bethlehem, however, the situation was different. Because of the great need for sheep for animal sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem, sheep were outside in the fields throughout the entire year. The shepherds of these flocks were despised. They wandered as nomads, constantly moving about the countryside looking for new pastures, and as a group were often considered to be untrustworthy and dishonest men. Isn't it interesting, then, that it was to shepherds that the angels appeared to present this amazing news (see Luke 2:8-15)?

9 "Christ" is the Greek word that corresponds to the Hebrew word "Messiah." Both words mean "the Anointed One." Jews knew that this name referred to the one about whom the prophets spoke, the one promised to come as Redeemer and Deliverer. Their concept of deliverer, however, had a political context. They were looking for someone to deliver them from the oppression of the Roman government.



Chapter 3: The Birth of Jesus

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10 We are familiar with the words, “On earth peace, goodwill toward men” from Luke 2:14. A more accurate interpretation of the angel’s words is the translation found in the New International Version, which is “on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” All Scripture must be taken in context with the rest of Scripture, and the New Testament teaches that peace with God comes through Jesus Christ. “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our LORD Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). The angel’s message was not that Jesus’ coming would bring universal peace upon the earth. Actually, Christ’s coming has precipitated conflict between nations and within families as people have responded to the gospel either in faith or in rejection. It also was not a peace that every person would experience. The peace that Jesus brings is the peace that a sinful person experiences after he has been justified by grace through faith.

11 Galatians 4:4-5 says that Jesus was “born under law” so that He could “redeem those under law.” Eight days after birth, every Jewish male was circumcised. Modern medicine has shown that the percentage of vitamin K (the vitamin that causes blood to clot) is higher in the body on the eighth day than any day previous, and after the eighth day the percentage begins to drop. This makes the eighth day an ideal time to circumcise a child. Though Jesus was sinless and this sign of removing uncleanness was unnecessary, He willingly subjected Himself to the demands of the Law. Without circumcision, He would not be recognized by the Jews as a descendant of Abraham and would not have been authorized to teach in the Jewish synagogue. He would have been considered the same as a Gentile and as one apostate from the Jewish faith. Circumcision was part of fulfilling the Law’s requirements so that Jesus could be the sacrifice for sin and redeem His people, both Jews and Gentiles. (Packer and Tenney, *Illustrated Manners and Customs*, 447–448.)

12 According to Leviticus 12, a woman was ceremonially unclean for forty days after giving birth. At the end of this time, the woman was to bring a sacrifice of a lamb for a burnt offering and a pigeon for a sin offering. If the family couldn’t afford a lamb, the law permitted the woman to offer two pigeons. Jesus’ family was so poor that Mary had to bring two pigeons.

13 Commentators agree that at this time the spiritual climate in Israel was at one of its lowest points. Yet even during this discouraging time, God preserved a faithful remnant. Simeon, an ordinary person, was a devout man and was purposefully looking for God’s fulfillment of prophecy. God had been silent for 400 years, but Simeon hadn’t stopped believing in the promises of God.

14 In his words of praise, Simeon was seeing the fulfillment of prophecies from Isaiah 42:6, Isaiah 49:6, and Isaiah 8:14.

seen with their own eyes.⁴ Mary, after the shepherds left, had many things to think about over and over again.⁵

11 In accordance with Jewish law, Joseph and Mary circumcised the newborn baby when he was eight days old and named Him Jesus, in obedience to the angel Gabriel’s command. Of all possible names that the Son of Man could have chosen, He chose Jesus (meaning “the LORD saves”), a name reminding us of God’s grace and deliverance from sin.

12 After forty days, Joseph and Mary went to the temple in Jerusalem to offer the purification sacrifice and consecrate Jesus, their firstborn son, to the Lord. Since they were a poor family, they brought two pigeons for the sacrifice instead of a more expensive lamb.⁶

13 That day, Simeon, a righteous and devout man in Jerusalem, decided to visit the temple.⁷ He was just an ordinary man, but the Lord had told him, “You won’t die before you see the Lord’s Christ.” When he saw the child Jesus at the temple, he knew that Jesus was the Christ. Cradling the baby in his arms, Simeon praised God, saying, “Sovereign Lord, I can now die in peace, for I have seen your salvation. This

Prophet:

As light to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel, Jesus declared God’s truth to both Jews and Gentiles.

child will be a light to the Gentiles and a glory to Your people Israel.” To Mary, he said, “This child will cause the rising and falling of many people in Israel. He will reveal the thoughts of many hearts, and a sword will pierce your heart, too.”⁶

14 There was also an eighty-four-year-old woman named Anna who never left the temple court. She had been married only seven years when her husband died. Every day since then, she had worshipped day and night in the temple, fasting and praying to the Lord. When she saw baby Jesus, she realized through the Holy Spirit that this child was the Messiah who would bring redemption to Israel. She thanked God, and from that time forward, she encouraged the faithful in Jerusalem to look for God’s redemption that had come.⁷ You can imagine that, after all this, Mary had even more things to think about.

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus returned to Bethlehem, and no one in Bethlehem even knew that the King was living among them.

4. See Luke 2:17, 20.

5. See Luke 2:19.

6. See Luke 2:25-35.

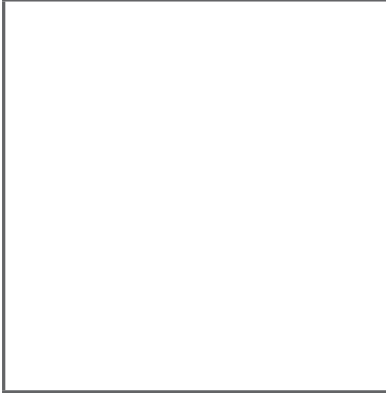
7. See Luke 2:36-38.



Review Worksheets

A. KEY FACTS: In the following boxes, draw two pictures that show Jesus' poverty.

Jesus: Born into Poverty



B. STORY FACTS:

1. Write the letter of the description that best describes the person or group of people listed.

 e Micah

a. Heard angel's good news message

 d Caesar Augustus

b. Announced Jesus' birth to shepherds

 a Shepherds

c. Prayed every day in the temple

 f Simeon

d. Decreed a census

 b Angel

e. Prophesied about Jesus' birthplace

 g Joseph

f. Prophesied about Jesus in temple

 c Anna

g. Offered pigeons as a sacrifice

2. What do you know about the town of Bethlehem? Write down two facts.

a. Bethlehem means "house of bread."

b. Bethlehem was the birthplace of King David.

15 The coming of Jesus, the King, is good news for three reasons. These three reasons were important 2,000 years ago and they are still important today. First, the coming of Jesus is good news because He is the Savior, the solution to our biggest problem. What is our greatest problem? It's not our health, difficult relationships, lack of education, unhappiness, or poverty. Our biggest problem is our sin because it separates us from a holy God, and there is nothing we can do by ourselves to get rid of the guilt of our sin. Jesus is the Savior, and it is through His life, death, and resurrection that we can have our sin forgiven and live with God eternally. Second, Jesus is the glory of Israel. He fulfilled all the covenant promises and was the Messiah that God's people had been expecting. Having the Savior of the world descend through their nation's royal line and thus be the source of blessing to the world brought God's glory to the people of Israel. The fact that Jesus was the glory of Israel is good news for Gentile Christians, too. Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and the fulfillment of the Lord's promise to Abraham that all the world would be blessed through him (see Genesis 12:1-3). Third, the coming of Jesus brought salvation to the entire world. Jesus was not just the Messiah of Israel, but He was also the light to the Gentiles. As the gospel spread to Gentile people, the Holy Spirit took away the spiritual blindness from the Gentiles who had been in darkness and shined the light of God's glorious truth found in Jesus (see Luke 2:29-32). All believers today enjoy the benefits of reconciliation with God because Jesus, the Messiah and King, came to earth one day in Bethlehem.

Memory Page • Story Time • Worksheets

C. WHAT'S THE REASON? Circle the *correct* answer.

1. Joseph went to Bethlehem to register for the census because _____.
 - a. it was the closest town to Nazareth
 - ☒ b. he was a the descendent of David
 - c. he had many friends and relatives in Bethlehem
2. Joseph and Mary circumcised Jesus at eight days old because _____.
 - ☒ a. the Jewish law required it
 - b. an angel commanded them to do it
 - c. Jesus had to be purified from sin
3. Simeon said that now he could die in peace because _____.
 - a. he finally had been forgiven of his sin
 - b. God had given him a grandson to carry on his name
 - ☒ c. he had seen Jesus and knew He was Christ

D. IMPORTANT TRUTH—JESUS WAS THE MESSIAH:

Unscramble the words to discover God's gospel message.

1. The Angel:

"I bring GOOD NEWS. Today a SAVIOR is
GODO SWEN RAVIOS
born in Bethlehem who is CHRIST the Lord."
STIRCH

2. The Angels:

“ GLORY to God in the highest. PEACE on earth to men on
LOGYR CEAPE
whom His FAVOR rests.”
AVORF

3. Simeon:

“This child will be a LIGHT to the Gentiles and a glory to
GLITH
Your people ISRAEL He will reveal the thoughts of many HEARTS.”
LESRIA THARES

E. THINK ABOUT IT: The word “gospel” means “good news.” Why are the messages from the angels and from Simeon good news for you? _____

Answers will vary.