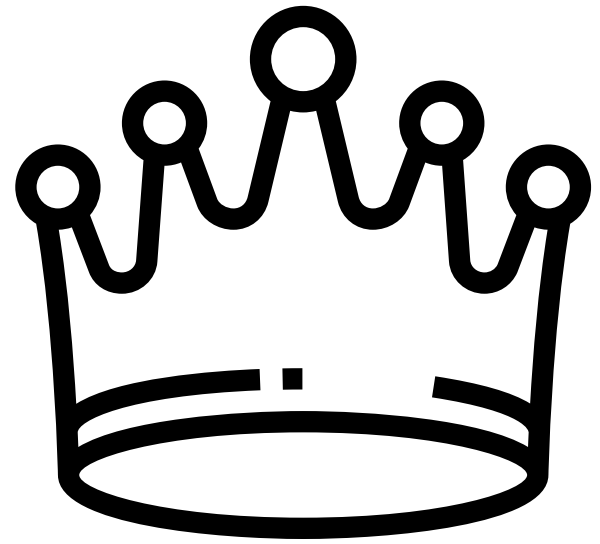


LESSON 4

Jesus Christ: Yesterday, Today and Forever



LESSON 4

Jesus Christ: Yesterday, Today and Forever

**UNDERSTANDING
WHAT THE
BIBLE ACTUALLY
REVEALS ABOUT
THE TRUE JESUS
CHRIST IS
ESSENTIAL TO
YOUR LIFE AND,
ULTIMATELY,
YOUR
SALVATION.**

Jesus Christ is widely considered one of the most influential people who ever lived. He is seen as the founder of the largest religion in the world. Some consider Him God, others consider Him a prophet, and still others consider Him just a great moral teacher. But who was He *really*?

Here's the story of Jesus Christ, told in a way that generally everyone can agree on:

About 2,000 years ago, the son of a Jewish carpenter performed miracles and died by being nailed to a wooden cross.

Unfortunately, beyond that sentence, there's a doctrinal smorgasbord when it comes to Jesus of Nazareth—including countless opinions and theories concerning *who* He was, *when* He lived, *if* He lived, *what* He taught and (probably most important) *why* He did all that He did.

The reason behind the life and death of Jesus Christ remains a mystery to many—but it doesn't have to be. The Bible makes this bold statement:

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is *no other name* under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12, emphasis added throughout).

The context clearly shows that name is Jesus Christ (verses 10-11).

Understanding what the Bible actually reveals about the true Jesus Christ (hint: there is a false Jesus Christ!) is absolutely essential to your life and, ultimately, your salvation. This lesson is designed to introduce you to the *real* Jesus Christ, start to finish. We've divided it into five primary sections:

- 1. Who He Was.**
- 2. What He Came to Do.**
- 3. What He Wasn't Like.**
- 4. What He's Coming Back to Do.**
- 5. What He's Doing Now.**

These are all important subjects that you need to understand. As the above scripture stated, knowing the *real* Jesus is the ultimate “salvation issue.” This lesson will take you deep into your Bible to find answers and help you get to know the real Jesus Christ.

PART 1

Who He Was

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST WERE PART OF A PLAN THAT WAS SET IN MOTION A LONG, LONG TIME AGO.



TERMINOLOGY

Foundation of the world

The Greek word for *foundation* is *katabole* and refers to the act of starting or conceiving something. When connected to the “world,” it refers to the time before the earth was in existence.

Was Jesus Christ’s life and death part of God’s plan or a last-minute change?

1 Peter 1:20: “He indeed was foreordained before the _____ of the world.”

Luke 24:44: “All things must be _____ which were written in the _____ of Moses and the _____ and the Psalms concerning _____.”

Deeper insight

The life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ was a central part of God’s plan before the foundation of the world. Before He ever breathed life into the very first man, God foresaw that mankind’s greatest struggle would be with sin. He knew we would have a tendency to make self-destructive choices that would bring pain and suffering to ourselves and others. For that purpose, He gave us His law—a clear dividing line between good choices and bad choices, a way for us to discern between “life and good, death and evil” (Deuteronomy 30:15).

God was also aware that we would have the tendency to disregard His perfect law and instead live our own way (Proverbs 21:2). God loves us and wants the best for us, but sin—the breaking of His law (1 John 3:4)—results in a death penalty: “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). For those who choose sin, and the misery it brings, the just (and most merciful) punishment is death—in other words, to cease to exist *forever*.

Unfortunately, the list of people who have earned that death penalty includes—well, everyone. “For . . . all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:22-23). No one has lived a sinless life, which means we all, at some point or another, have earned the death penalty.

This, too, did not take God by surprise. Peter tells us that Christ was “foreordained before the foundation of the world.” In the book of Revelation we read that Jesus was “slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). His coming and sacrificial death for sin (which we will cover in more depth later in this lesson) was a part of God’s plan from the beginning. Christ Himself said that His coming had been prophesied extensively in the Old Testament—in the books of Moses, by the prophets, and in the Psalms. The life and death of Jesus Christ were part of a plan that was set in motion a long, long time ago.

Who was Christ before He came to earth?

John 1:1-2: “In the _____ was the _____, and the _____ was with God, and the _____ was God. He was in the beginning with God.”

**WHEN GOD THE
FATHER WANTS
SOMETHING
DONE OR SAID,
IT IS THE WORD,
JESUS CHRIST,
WHO CARRIES
IT OUT ON HIS
BEHALF.**

Deeper insight

Many people think of Genesis 1 as the farthest back in history the Bible goes because it describes the creation and forming of the physical order. But John 1 actually describes a relationship that predates everything discussed in the first chapter of Genesis! John 1 describes a time before anything physical was created, when only two beings existed: One referred to here as “God” (identified as “the Father,” see verses 14 and 18) and the other called “the Word” (identified as Jesus Christ in verse 14).

The word translated “Word” in John 1 is the Greek *logos*. This word is the noun form of the Greek verb *lego*, which describes the action of speaking (it is **translated** “say” or “speak” 1,245 times in the New Testament). It can be translated as “word,” “message,” “report” and sometimes even “deed” (*Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 2006, p. 803).

John used the word *Logos* to describe Jesus’ role throughout eternity as being the One who communicates and acts on behalf of the Father. He is essentially the being in the God family who serves as the spokesman of God the Father. When God the Father wants something done or said, it is the Word (Jesus Christ) who carries it out on His behalf.

A modern analogy can help us understand this better. Corporations are usually made up of a board of directors and a chief executive officer (CEO). The board of directors has the ultimate authority in the corporation and sets the goals and direction. It is then the CEO who works on behalf of the board to implement that direction and serve as the spokesperson of the organization. In this analogy, the Father would be similar to the chairman of the board (the One who has the ultimate authority) and the Word would be similar to the CEO, in that He carries out those initiatives.

Before He came to earth as a Man, the Word lived for eternity with God the Father and was the One through whom all things were created and who interacted with human beings in Old Testament times. We covered this important truth in detail in Lesson 3.

What major acts did Christ perform as the Word?

John 1:3-4: “_____ things were made through Him, and without Him _____ was made that was made. In Him was _____, and the life was the light of men.”

Hebrews 1:1-2: “God . . . has in these last days spoken to us by His _____, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He _____ the _____.”

Deeper insight

The Word, the member of the God family who became Jesus Christ, was the being through whom God directly created the universe. All things—whether angels, planets, laws of physics or the human race itself—owe their existence to God the Father and Jesus Christ. When we read about God creating and ordering the universe and earth in Genesis 1, we are reading about God the Father and the One who later came as Jesus Christ.

**WHEN GOD,
“THE WORD,”
CAME TO
EARTH AS
JESUS CHRIST,
HE WILLINGLY
GAVE UP
ALL THE
POWERS AND
PRIVILEGES OF
BEING GOD.**

Gnosticism

A heretical belief system that existed in the early years of Christianity and taught that flesh is inherently evil and that one needed secret, extrabiblical knowledge to be delivered from the flesh.

Though the Father has always had supreme authority, He did the work of creation through the Word (Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:15-18).

Why does this matter? Consider this: If the death of Christ was “foreordained before the foundation of the world,” then God the Father and the Word created the human race with the *full and complete* knowledge that Jesus Christ, the Word, would one day die for it. When God and the Word created Adam, They understood that if Adam sinned (which he did), the Word would have to come to earth as Jesus Christ and die in order for any human being to have a chance to be forgiven from sin and to live forever.

How can we even begin to understand love of that magnitude? “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16).

Was Christ truly human during His time on the earth?

John 1:14: “And the Word became _____ and dwelt among us.”

Philippians 2:5-8: “Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men” (New American Standard Bible).

Deeper insight

When God, “the Word,” came to earth as Jesus Christ, He willingly gave up all the powers and privileges of being God. He *became* flesh. The One through whom God created the laws of nature and the human body *willingly* became subject to all those laws and the limitations of the human body. He got tired (Mark 4:38), experienced hunger and thirst (Mark 11:12; John 4:6-7), felt pain (Hebrews 5:8) and ultimately died after suffering severe torture, crucifixion and being pierced by a spear.

This willing transformation occurred when the Word left the throne of God and was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary (Luke 1:31-35).

This truth has often been confused with different ideas. One major idea that influenced some during the era of the early Church was gnosticism. The gnostics believed that flesh was inherently evil. They believed that perfect spirit (Christ) could never inhabit defiled flesh. They taught that Jesus only *appeared* to come as a man—almost like some sort of ancient hologram.

The Gospel accounts and later the epistles constantly combat this false doctrine, explicitly teaching that God (the Word) truly did give up His spirit existence and fully came “in the flesh” (1 Peter 3:18). In fact, the apostles taught that this truth was so important that anyone who rejected that Christ came “in the flesh” was called “a deceiver and antichrist” (2 John 1:7; see also 1 John 4:2-3).

PART 2

What Jesus Came to Do

**JESUS CAME
TO SET AN
EXAMPLE. THE
WAY OF LIFE HE
LIVED IS TO BE
STUDIED AND
IMITATED.**

In His own words, what was Jesus Christ's reason for coming to earth?

It's widely understood that Jesus came to die for our sins. That is true, but that wasn't the only reason He came.

Why Jesus Came to Earth

Look up the verses listed below and briefly explain what each reveals about Christ's purpose for coming to earth.

Scripture	Purpose
Matthew 11:27	
Luke 2:49; John 6:38	
John 18:37	
Matthew 16:18	
Matthew 5:17	
1 Peter 2:21	
John 1:29; 1 John 4:9-10; 3:8	

**DURING
HIS TIME
ON EARTH,
CHRIST WAS
OBEYING AND
REVEALING
THE WILL OF
THE FATHER.**

These verses reveal aspects of Christ's purpose for coming to earth. From these passages, we learn how much hinges on Jesus Christ.

We learn that:

Christ did not come to free mankind from the harsh God of the Old Testament (often believed to be the Father). Instead, He came to reveal the Father! The Father was generally unknown to humanity before Christ's coming. The God who interacted with humans in the Old Testament was the Word—the being who later came to earth as Jesus Christ. During His time on earth, Christ was obeying and revealing the will of the Father.

Christ came to reveal the truth. His teachings reveal the Father's will for our lives and the foundational doctrines that Christians are expected to believe and practice.

Christ came to build the Church. The Church would be the group of people who would faithfully follow and proclaim His teachings and way of life after He returned to heaven. That Church officially began on the Day of Pentecost after Christ's resurrection and continues to this day (Acts 2).

Christ came to fulfill the law. This means He came to fulfill many prophecies found in the Old Testament (some of which are found in the first five books of the Bible, also called "the Law") and also to fill (or imbue) God's laws with greater depth and meaning through His teachings and example. His life perfectly demonstrated the intent and spirit of the law given in the Old Testament.

Jesus came to set an example. The way of life He lived is to be studied and imitated. One of the common words used to describe Christ's followers is *disciple*, which essentially means a student or pupil of a master (in this case, *the Master*).

There is so much to learn about the purpose of Jesus Christ's life, ministry, sacrifice and resurrection. We encourage our readers to continue studying this topic after they complete this course, especially the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life.

What was the primary purpose Jesus came to accomplish?

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

Deeper insight

This verse is the most quoted verse in Christianity. And for good reason—in simple and concise language it reveals the primary reason the Word became a man and came to earth. Sadly, because it is so often quoted, the powerful depth contained in this verse is often not fully grasped by those who use it. Let's dissect it to see what it is really telling us.

"For God so loved the world . . ."

This shows us that it was ultimately the Father's plan and purpose to send Christ to earth. Why did He do that? This verse shows us—because of His incredible love for human beings (1 John 4:9, 10, 19). He created us through the Word in His very image—the image of God (Genesis 1:27). It is by His love and grace that He gives us physical life. But He wants

**TO BELIEVE
IS TO HAVE
A DEEP,
CONVICTING
FAITH THAT
YOU THEN
ACT ON.**

us to be and have so much more. The problem is that we have all sinned and separated ourselves from Him (Isaiah 59:2).

Modern Christianity rarely talks about God the Father, but this verse shows it was the Father's love that was the driving force behind what Christ came to do.

“... that He gave His only begotten Son ...”

In order for us to fulfill the purpose He lovingly created us for, the problem of sin had to be dealt with. God had a plan to deal with that problem, and it included sending God the Word, the second member of the God family, to earth as a Man who would live a perfect, sinless life and then die for the sins of the world. We should ponder how much love the Father showed by giving His Son as a sacrifice for our sins.

For eternity, He lived and worked with the Word—together they composed the God family. He then sent the Word to earth, which left a void by His side for a little over 30 years. But the hardest part was witnessing His Son's brutal death. For His plan to move forward, He had to allow it to happen, even though He had complete power to stop it at any time (Matthew 26:53). There is no way we can truly grasp the depth of the love and sacrifice the Father made—but He did it, willingly, out of His love for us.

“... that whoever believes in Him ...”

One of the first steps to being forgiven of our sins and being in God's family is to believe in Jesus Christ. But that means far more than a mental recognition. Sadly, many people have taken this to mean someone simply has to mentally or verbally profess Jesus as the Savior, and then he or she will be saved. When you understand the entire message of the Bible, *belief* means so much more. To *believe* is to have a deep, convicting faith that you then *act* on. Belief leads to conviction, conviction leads to action, and action leads to a faithful, lifelong endurance.

To see an example of *belief* in action, read Acts 2. After the apostle Peter delivered a powerful sermon on the Day of Pentecost proving Jesus was God and the Messiah, a group of people heard and *believed*. As a result of their belief, they asked Peter, “What shall we do?”

Peter answered by urging them to “repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (verse 38). The point is: Belief was just the first step and had to be followed by action. We will cover the topics of repentance and baptism in Lesson 10.

“... should not perish but have everlasting life.”

This last section of the verse explains why Jesus is called the Savior and what it means to be saved. God has decreed from the beginning that the ultimate penalty for sin is death (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23). All who have sinned (and that's everyone, Romans 3:23) have earned that death penalty. But Jesus Christ's coming, His perfect life and His sacrifice make it possible for us to be *saved* from that penalty. That's what this verse means when it says those who believe (and all that it entails) *will not perish*. Instead, those who truly believe and stay faithful will be given the gift of everlasting life in God's family. This is God's purpose for all of us—driven by His love.

That is why He sent “His only begotten Son.”

**FORGIVENESS
OF THE DEATH
PENALTY IS
ONLY POSSIBLE
THROUGH
JESUS CHRIST.**

Why could Jesus Christ die for the sins of everyone?

Titus 2:13: “Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great _____ and _____ Jesus Christ.”

Hebrews 4:15: “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points _____ as we are, yet _____ sin.”

Hebrews 9:26: “But now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away _____ by the _____ of Himself.”

Deeper insight

As we have already covered, the major problem for human beings is sin. Sin is defined as breaking the laws of God (1 John 3:4), which leads to a life separated from God and ultimately death (Isaiah 59:2; Romans 6:23).

In order for sin to be forgiven, that death penalty has to be paid. In Old Testament times, God gave ancient Israel an elaborate system of animal sacrifices. Some of those sacrifices were to be offered when people sinned, to graphically demonstrate to them the grave seriousness of sin—when you break God’s law, the shedding of blood and death are required to cover it. But those animal sacrifices did not ultimately erase the death penalty from anyone’s record. The author of Hebrews explained it very plainly: “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4).

As we learned by studying John 3:16, forgiveness of the death penalty is only possible through Jesus Christ. But why could this one Man make possible the forgiveness of all sins through His death? Hypothetically, could any human being have been the savior?

As the above scriptures explain, there are three main reasons why Jesus (and only Jesus) could be the Savior of all humanity.

1. Jesus is God.

He is divine and has existed for all eternity. He was the member of the God family through whom all things were created (Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16). His life was worth far more than the sum total of all the lives He created. Thus He was able to take the penalty that all people who ever lived—billions upon billions of people—deserved.

2. Jesus never sinned.

Jesus Christ never sinned, even though He faced temptation in all points (Hebrews 4:15). Think about what that means. It was possible for Him to sin. He wasn’t a robot programmed to only think and do righteous things. He had free choice and had to *willingly choose* to obey God’s law in every facet of life at all times. He was tempted in “all points”—meaning in all general areas of God’s law. Sometimes that was a struggle. For instance, before He faced three major temptations from Satan, He fasted for 40 days and 40 nights to prepare (Matthew 4). Resisting temptation wasn’t a spiritual cakewalk for Jesus. He had to strive hard and stay close to His Father for strength.

**JESUS
PERFECTLY
OBEYED
GOD'S LAW IN
LETTER AND
IN SPIRIT.**

If He had sinned just once, He would have had to die for Himself and would not have been able to die for anyone else. The whole plan of God would have failed and ended at the moment He sinned.

But He did not sin. Ever.

In fact, He didn't just not sin—but He lived a perfectly righteous life of active *love* toward the Father and other people. He perfectly obeyed God's law in letter and in spirit. His life is the example all Christians seek to follow and emulate.

3. Jesus allowed Himself to be sacrificed.

Christ's ultimate display of perfect righteousness and obedience was demonstrated at the end of His life. He showed love in its most powerful and purest form by willingly sacrificing His life for others (John 15:13).

But we shouldn't think of His sacrifice as something that He just did easily. The decision to willingly allow Himself to experience the most brutal and excruciating death a man could experience was something He struggled with. He even prayed to the Father to spare Him from it (Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). The book of Hebrews tells us, "He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death" (Hebrews 5:7).

But once it was clear to Him that it was the Father's will for Him to do it, He willingly submitted to that will. Jesus saw past the pain and suffering He would experience to the end result of His sacrifice—human beings having the opportunity to be forgiven of their sins and live forever in God's family (John 17:3).



**A CLOSER
LOOK**

**Son of Man or
Son of God?**

In the New Testament, Jesus is sometimes called "the Son of God," but in other places is called "the Son of Man." Do these two titles contradict each other?

No, they simply reveal two different truths about Christ's identity. When He's called "the Son of God," His divine identity is being emphasized—that He came down "*from* the Father" (John 8:42; 16:28). When He's called "the Son of Man," His humanity is being emphasized—that He *willingly* emptied Himself of the power and privileges of life at the God-level to come as a physical human being (Romans 1:3; 1 John 4:1-3).

PART 3

What He *Wasn't* Like

**JESUS NEVER
SAID HE CAME
TO CONVERT
EVERYONE TO
CHRISTIANITY
AT THIS TIME.**

Parable

A short, usually fictional, story used to teach a specific spiritual truth.

Spiritual blindness

The Bible often uses blindness as a metaphor to describe people who have not been called by God to understand His truth. Without God's direct intervention, the human mind cannot see spiritual truths.

Why is there so much confusion and disagreement over what Christ came to do?

John 6:44: "No one can _____ to Me unless the Father who sent Me _____ him."

Luke 8:10: "To you it has been given to know the _____ of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that 'Seeing they may _____ see, and hearing they may _____ understand.'"

Matthew 7:14: "Because _____ is the gate and _____ is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Deeper insight

The above scriptures reveal a little-known fact: Jesus Christ never expected everybody to understand and believe Him. He never said He came to convert everyone to Christianity at this time. In fact, He specifically stated that most people would not (and could not) understand and follow Him!

Notice: He said that one of His major teaching styles, speaking in parables, was designed to *hide the meaning* from the majority who would hear and read them. In another place, we read Christ saying that His disciples were given understanding of His parables, but "to them [the rest of the people] it has not been given" (Matthew 13:11). Christ said that in order for a person to understand spiritual truth, he or she had to be *drawn* (or called) by God the Father.

The above scriptures illustrate two essential truths that students of this course must understand:

- 1. God the Father and Christ are not revealing the truth to everyone at this time.**
- 2. A person has to be drawn, or called, by God the Father in order to truly have a relationship with Him and be a Christian.**

Right now, we live in an era of history when the majority of people are deceived by Satan (Revelation 12:9). He blinds their minds from understanding spiritual truth. In fact, one of His greatest deceptions is presenting a false Jesus Christ.

Since these two points may be surprising to some of our students, let's explore them a bit more thoroughly in the Bible.

**THE SAD
REALITY IS THAT
THE “JESUS”
PRESENTED BY
MANY PEOPLE
TODAY IS NOT
THE SAME
JESUS WE READ
ABOUT IN THE
BIBLE.**

Read the following scriptures and answer the questions.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:4.

1. How does this verse refer to Satan?

2. What does this verse say that he has done to the majority of humanity?

Read 2 Corinthians 11:4.

1. What three specific things does the apostle Paul warn about in this verse?

2. Does the above scripture infer that there are false versions of Christianity?

The sad reality is that the “Jesus” presented by many people today (including churches) is not the same Jesus we read about in the Bible. Let’s look at some of the commonly held myths about Jesus that contribute to most people believing “another Jesus” and then see what the *real* Jesus was actually like.

Myth #1: Jesus came to abolish and “nail to the cross” the restrictive law of the Old Testament.

Did Christ “abolish” the law?

Matthew 5:17-18: “Do not think that I came to _____ the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means _____ from the _____ till all is fulfilled.”

Deeper insight

As we covered earlier, Jesus did not say He came to “abolish” God’s law. He specifically said He *didn’t* come to “destroy” it! After this verse, He went on to say that “whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven” (verse 19).

When asked what one had to do to have eternal life, Jesus’ first answer was “keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17).

In fact, every single one of the 10 Commandments was reinforced by Jesus Christ!

**BOTH JESUS
CHRIST AND
THE APOSTLE
PAUL STRONGLY
TAUGHT THAT
SIN MUST
BE FOUGHT
AGAINST AND
OVERCOME.**

Sin
Thoughts or behavior that
violates any point of God's law.

Jesus and the 10 Commandments

Look up each scripture reference where Christ reinforced a particular commandment and match it with the appropriate commandment.

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| 1. ____ First Commandment (no other gods). | A. Matthew 5:21-22 |
| 2. ____ Second Commandment (no idolatry). | B. Matthew 6:9 |
| 3. ____ Third Commandment (not taking God's name in vain). | C. Matthew 15:4-7 |
| 4. ____ Fourth Commandment (remember the Sabbath day). | D. Matthew 5:33 |
| 5. ____ Fifth Commandment (honor parents). | E. Matthew 4:10 |
| 6. ____ Sixth Commandment (no murder). | F. John 10:10 |
| 7. ____ Seventh Commandment (no adultery). | G. Matthew 5:27-28 |
| 8. ____ Eighth Commandment (no stealing). | H. John 4:24 |
| 9. ____ Ninth Commandment (no lying). | I. Luke 12:15 |
| 10. ____ Tenth Commandment (no coveting). | J. Mark 2:27-28 |

Myth #2: By dying for our sins, Christ freed us from our responsibility to fight against sin.

Did Christ give us license to sin?

Matthew 18:9: "And if your eye causes you to _____ pluck it out and cast it from you."

John 8:11: "Go and _____ no more."

Romans 6:1-2: "Shall we _____ in sin that grace may abound? Certainly _____!"

How shall we who _____ to sin live any longer in it?"

Deeper insight

Both Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul strongly taught that sin must be fought against and overcome. Sadly, those who believe that Christ's sacrifice frees them from the obligation to resist sin are misunderstanding one of the most fundamental elements of true Christianity: that "our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin" (Romans 6:6).

Consider the following anecdote that illustrates the flaw of thinking that by dying for our sins Christ gives Christians a license to sin.



A CLOSER LOOK

The Ticket

A police officer pulls you over for reckless speeding and gives you a ticket you know you can't afford to pay. You realize that what you were doing was wrong and you regret what you've done, but you also realize there's no way you can ever pay what you owe.

Now imagine that the officer understands your predicament, takes the ticket back from you, and says, "Don't worry, I'll pay this for you. You now owe nothing."

What do you do? How does that affect how you drive from that moment on?

The worst way to express appreciation would be to continue speeding. If that same officer pulled you over again, what would you say? "Oh, hi officer, I just figured since you didn't mind paying my ticket before, maybe you wanted to do it again."

No, the proper response would be to be thankful for the officer's mercy and commit yourself to trying harder to obey the speed limits in the future.

God forgives our sins so that we can be *different*; so that we can break free of sin—not dive back into it again and again. Christ didn't suffer and die so that we could keep doing whatever we wanted. He did it so that we could be free of our sins and become more like Him (Romans 12:1).

If you want to show Jesus that you truly value His sacrifice, then start *changing*.

JESUS LOOKED LIKE THE AVERAGE JEW OF HIS DAY.

Myth #3: Jesus had long hair and physically stood out from everyone around Him.

What did Jesus physically look like?

Isaiah 53:2: "He has no form or comeliness [splendor]; and when we see Him, there is no _____ that we should desire Him."

Deeper insight

Art and movies usually portray Jesus as physically distinct from those around Him. He's often portrayed as wearing a white robe, having long hair and being taller and more pious looking than those surrounding Him. But the real Jesus did not look anything like this. Jesus was prophesied to look absolutely normal—His physical appearance wasn't distinct from the people who surrounded Him. He was born a descendant of the tribe of Judah (Matthew 1:3-16). He looked like the average Jew of His day.

The Gospel accounts show us that Jesus could easily disappear into a crowd (Luke 4:30; John 8:59). In fact, when Judas betrayed Jesus, he had to give a special sign to the officers who were to arrest Him because they couldn't distinguish which one He was among the rest of the disciples (Luke 22:47-48). Even after Judas kissed Jesus (a common greeting in the Mediterranean world), Jesus still had to verbally identify Himself before they knew for sure it was Him (John 18:4-8).

**THE GOSPELS
GIVE US NO
DETAILS OF
HIS PHYSICAL
APPEARANCE
BECAUSE
GOD DOES
NOT WANT
US TO TRY
TO PORTRAY
CHRIST
ARTISTICALLY.**

Galilee

A region north of Judea where Jesus came of age and began His ministry. Nazareth, the Galilean city where Jesus grew up, was located about 65 miles north of Jerusalem.

Did Jesus have long hair?

1 Corinthians 11:14: “Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long _____, it is a _____ to him?”

Deeper insight

Though Jesus is often portrayed artistically in many different ways, the common characteristic of these depictions is that He had long hair. But this is a myth that actually contradicts what Paul wrote under the inspiration of God! Paul was very direct: It is a *dishonor* (or a shame) for a man to have long hair. Just 13 verses earlier, Paul made an equally direct statement: “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (verse 1).

If Paul imitated Christ and Jesus had long hair, it would make absolutely no sense for Paul to criticize long hair on men! The fact is that Jesus had short hair. That is why a man who imitated Jesus wrote against long hair while under the inspiration of God. Historical records also show that Jewish and Roman men in that era typically had short hair.

As you study the life of Jesus in the Gospel accounts, you will notice that there are certain elements of Jesus’ life that are conspicuously absent. This is not by accident. The Gospels give us no details of His physical appearance because God does not want us to try to portray Christ artistically. The 10 Commandments specifically forbid making any physical representations of God (Exodus 20:4-5).

Myth #4: Jesus was born on Dec. 25, and it’s appropriate to celebrate His birth on that date.

Was Jesus’ birthday on Dec. 25?

Luke 2:1, 4-5: “And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be _____ . . . Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called _____ . . . to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.”

Luke 2:7-8: “And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Now there were in the same country _____ living out in the _____, keeping watch over their flock by _____.”

Deeper insight

What most people know about the birth of Jesus Christ typically comes from the Christmas holiday, which supposedly celebrates His birth. But the common stories and images surrounding that holiday actually contain more myths about Jesus’ birth than truth. The fact is, we know few details about the event because the Gospel

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HISTORICAL
FACT THAT
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THE NEW
TESTAMENT
ERA.**

accounts don't give it much emphasis. Matthew devotes eight verses to it (Matthew 1:18-25), and Luke devotes 20 verses (Luke 2:1-20). The Gospels of Mark and John don't mention it at all. Of course, if you read both Matthew's and Luke's accounts, you will not see any specific information given about the time of the year or even the season in which He was born. There's not one hint in the Gospels that Jesus was born on Dec. 25 (or in the winter at all). The evidence it does give points more strongly to His being born in a warmer season of the year.

First, we read that the reason for Joseph and Mary's trip to Judea was to present themselves for a census that was decreed by the Roman government. The Roman Empire excelled at organization and logistics (which is one reason it lasted so long). In order to get the most accurate count, the Roman government would have held the census in a season when it was the easiest for its citizens to travel. It's unlikely they would have chosen a time in the middle of winter—the cold and rainy season in Judea—to hold a census.

Second, Luke records the interesting fact that there were shepherds living outside in the fields with their flock during the time Jesus was born. But shepherds would not live out in the fields with their flocks during the winter season. They would typically keep the flocks out in the fields during the warmer months (April-October) and keep them in the sheepfold during the colder months (November-March).

Though these facts don't tell us exactly when Jesus was born, they give weight to the fact that He wasn't born anytime around the end of December. It is a well-documented historical fact that Christmas developed hundreds of years after the New Testament era and was based on pagan winter solstice celebrations. Christmas is not biblical, and it does not provide accurate images of the birth of Jesus Christ.

We have just covered four common myths about Jesus. But there are many more myths that have arisen in the nearly 2,000 years since He walked the earth.

PART 4

What He's Coming Back to Do

**CHRIST'S
RETURN
WILL BE
VISIBLE TO
ALL PEOPLE
AROUND
THE GLOBE.**

When Christ came to earth, did He fulfill “all things” that had been prophesied about Him, or are there things He still must fulfill?

Acts 1:11: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so _____ in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

Hebrews 9:28: “So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a _____ time, apart from sin, for _____.”

Deeper insight

Jesus Christ is coming back. He fulfilled many Old Testament prophecies during His first coming, but many more remain to be fulfilled at His second coming. These remaining prophecies depict Christ fulfilling a radically different role than He fulfilled during His first-century ministry. The four Gospels tell the story of Jesus coming as a human being, living a perfect life, suffering and dying to make the forgiveness of sins possible. The last book of the New Testament—the book of Revelation—tells the story of how Christ will return to earth in power and authority.

The primary purpose of His first coming was to make the forgiveness of sin possible. His second coming will establish the Kingdom of God on earth and make salvation available to all people.

Will Christ's return be in secret or visible?

Revelation 1:7: “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every _____ will _____ Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the _____ will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.”

Deeper insight

One common myth about Jesus' return is that He will return secretly and rapture His people to heaven. But this idea contradicts many scriptures.

Various prophecies of His second coming add important details describing what His second coming will be like and what will happen surrounding it.

Mount of Olives

A small mountain range that overlooks Jerusalem and the Temple Mount to the east. It was the location of many events during Jesus' ministry and will be the location where He will stand when He returns to earth.

Read the following verses and answer the questions.

1 Thessalonians 4:16: How will Christ's return be announced to the world?

Matthew 16:27: Who will accompany Christ when He appears in the clouds?

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:52: Who will join Christ in the air after He appears in the clouds?

Revelation 19:19: Will everyone on earth welcome Him at His return?

Zechariah 14:4: Where on earth will Christ land after He appears in the clouds?

After He resurrects the saints and defeats His enemies, what will Jesus Christ do?

Daniel 2:44: "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a _____ which shall never be destroyed; and the _____ shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these _____, and it shall stand _____."

Isaiah 9:6-7: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the _____ will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His _____ and _____ there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even _____."

**THOUGH THE
WORLD'S
GOVERNMENTS
WILL INITIALLY
RESIST, JESUS
WILL RETURN
TO ESTABLISH
AN ETERNAL
KINGDOM ON
THE EARTH—A
KINGDOM HE
WILL RULE.**

Deeper insight

The world around you is the result of roughly 6,000 years of human leadership. Human beings have accomplished many incredibly positive things, but we've also committed unthinkable atrocities—bringing upon ourselves extreme suffering. The latest and greatest technologies often serve to amplify the flaws and shortcomings that appear to be inextricably bound to our fundamental nature. In other words: it's not working.

This world's governments, religions and philosophies cannot solve the problems that lie at the heart of humanity—selfishness and sin. No amount of human effort has been able to rescue the human race from its own dark and self-destructive nature.

We need something different—and Jesus Christ's direct leadership is the answer. Though the world's governments will initially resist, Jesus will return to establish an eternal Kingdom on the earth—a Kingdom He will rule. That Kingdom will never end and will bring true peace and happiness to this world.

That Kingdom isn't something ethereal. It's not a physical church or something just in the human heart. It will be a literal government ruling over the earth, with all the necessary characteristics of a governing kingdom.

The Four Elements of the Kingdom

There are four basic elements of a kingdom: a king, law, territory and subjects. Read the following scriptures and describe what each reveals about the coming Kingdom of God:

Element of a Kingdom	Scripture	Fulfillment in Kingdom of God
King	Revelation 19:16	
Law	Isaiah 2:3	
Territory	Revelation 5:10	
Subjects	Daniel 7:14	

You will learn more details about the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth in Lesson 5 of this course.

PART 5

What He's Doing Now

**AS THE
ENTHRONED
SON OF GOD
IN HEAVEN,
ALL THINGS
HAVE BEEN
PUT UNDER
CHRIST'S
AUTHORITY.**

Where is Jesus Christ today?

Hebrews 12:2: "Jesus . . . endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the _____ hand of the _____ of God."

1 Peter 3:22: "[Jesus Christ] has gone into _____ and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made _____ to Him."

Deeper insight

After completing His mission here on earth, Jesus was resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:4) and then reclaimed His position at the right hand of God's heavenly throne. He is the only human being to have ascended to heaven (John 3:13). Despite what many teach, Christians are not going to join Jesus in heaven when they die. All Christians (whether dead or alive) are awaiting Christ's return to meet Him and reign with Him on the earth (Revelation 5:10).

As the enthroned Son of God in heaven, all things have been put under His authority (Hebrews 2:7-8). Even though all things have been put under Him, He will not actively govern the earth and rid the world of evil until after His return.

What is He doing?

Hebrews 4:14-16: "Seeing then that we have a great High _____ who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High _____ who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain _____ and find _____ to help in time of need."

Romans 8:34: "It is Christ who died . . . who also makes _____ for us."

1 John 2:1: "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone _____, we have an _____ with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

Deeper insight

As we have learned, Jesus existed for all eternity as God. But He willingly gave up that position for 33½ years to live and die as a human being. Though He and the Father created human life and understood our biology down to the smallest cell, before coming as a Man Jesus couldn't fully relate to the human experience because He had

**JESUS IS
PRESENTLY
IN HEAVEN
WORKING
BESIDE THE
FATHER
ON YOUR
BEHALF.**

always lived at a level infinitely higher than we do. One reason Jesus came was to fully experience humanity—with all of its pains, weaknesses and temptations—so He could understand and help us better.

Because He led a fully human life, Christ understands fully what it means to *be* human. He understands temptation. He understands emotional pain. He understands physical pain. He understands what it feels like to be hated by others and betrayed by those who know you best.

His experience as a human being uniquely qualifies Him to serve as the High Priest of the New Covenant. He understands our weaknesses, and He provides us with the mercy and grace we require in our times of need. He also advocates on our behalf to the Father. He intercedes for us to the Father. That's one reason Christians close every prayer "in Jesus' name." We pray to the Father through our High Priest and Advocate, Jesus Christ.

Yes, Jesus is presently in heaven working beside the Father on your behalf. And not just on your behalf, but also on behalf of people around the world who are striving to become more like Him and enter His family. He wants to help you overcome your shortcomings. He wants *you* to become fully like Him. He wants *you* to be a part of the Kingdom of God.

He's deeply invested in your life and future.

He literally *gave His life* for it.

Lesson Wrap-Up

This lesson has provided you a broad overview of many scriptural truths about Jesus Christ. This is an extremely important topic because Jesus Christ is the "chief cornerstone" (1 Peter 2:7) of true Christianity. He is the "rock" that we are to build our lives on (Matthew 16:18; 1 Corinthians 10:4).

At its most basic level, Christianity is fulfilling the injunction of 1 John 2:6: "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked."

Christianity is imitating Jesus Christ—carefully following His example in every aspect of our life.

In order to do that, we must study His life and understand how He *lived* and what He *taught*. Though this lesson covered many doctrinal truths about Christ, space does not permit us to cover His entire 33½-year life and ministry. The record of His life and ministry is found in the first four books of the New Testament—the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

We recommend our students take time to study the life of Jesus Christ in the Gospels. Since each of the four Gospels presents Jesus' life from a slightly different perspective, it can be helpful to purchase a harmony of the Gospels. A harmony of the Gospels takes the four Gospel accounts and places them side by side in chronological order. Reading the four Gospels together can be a helpful approach for gaining a full understanding of what Jesus Christ said and did.

Foundation Institute, Center for Biblical Education, sponsored by the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, uses ***A Harmony of the Gospels: New American Standard Edition*** by Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry. We also recommend ***A Harmony of the Gospels*** by A.T. Robertson. (Though these resources are helpful, any harmony involves judgments by the authors and may not reflect the order of every series of events accurately.)

If you would like to further study the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, Foundation Institute offers an archived online course covering the four Gospels, titled “Survey of the Gospels.” To take this free class, visit foundationinstitute.org and click the “Register Now” link.

Lesson 5 will cover the message Christ preached while He walked on earth—the message He called the *gospel*. There are many misconceptions about what exactly the gospel is all about. We will look into the Scriptures to discover what that message was, what it means, how it can change your life today—and how it will eventually change the entire world.

Supplemental Reading

Life, Hope & Truth offers additional resources that can help you better understand God’s inspired Word, the Holy Bible.

- [Getting to Know the God of the Bible >](#)
- [Jesus in the Old Testament? >](#)
- [Was Jesus Created? >](#)
- [The Birth of Jesus >](#)
- [Jesus, the Son of God >](#)
- [Jesus, the Son of Man >](#)
- [The Greatest Sacrifice Ever >](#)
- [Did Jesus Fulfill the Law? >](#)
- [What Did and Didn’t Jesus Look Like? >](#)
- [Where Did the Popular Image of Jesus Come From? >](#)
- [King of Kings and Lord of Lords >](#)

Life, Hope & Truth Bible Study Course

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A Basic Summary of Jesus Christ's Life and Ministry in the Four Gospels

Period	Major Events	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Jesus' birth, childhood and preministry life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jesus born in Bethlehem. Flight to Egypt to escape Herod's decree. Childhood visit to Jerusalem. Works as carpenter in Nazareth. 	1:18–2:23		2:1-52	
Beginning of Jesus' ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baptized by John the Baptist. Tempted by Satan in the wilderness. 	3:13–4:11	1:9-13	3:21–4:13	1:29-34
The early Galilean ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turns water into wine at wedding. 				2:1-12
The early Judean ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cleanses the temple. Conversations with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. 				2:13–4:42
The later Galilean ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Calls 4 fishermen to be disciples. Sermon on the Mount. Multiple healings and miracles. Disciples sent to preach and heal. The transfiguration. Says, "I will build My church." 	4:12–18:35	1:14–9:50	4:14–9:62	4:43-54; 6:1–7:1
The later Judean ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observes final Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. Preaches to large crowds. 			10:1–12:59	7:2–10:39
The Perean ministry (beyond the Jordan)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sends out the 70 disciples. Resurrects Lazarus. Pharisees plot to kill Jesus. 	19:1–20:28	10:1-52	13:22–18:43	10:40–11:57
Jerusalem and surrounding areas Christ's final week and death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The triumphal entry. Second cleansing of the temple. Tense conflicts with Pharisees. Olivet Prophecy. Institutes New Covenant Passover. Jesus arrested and tried on false charges. Crucified and dies at Golgotha. 	21:1–27:66	11:1–15:47	19:1–23:56	12:12–19:42
Resurrection and appearances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resurrected 3 days and nights after burial. Appears to disciples. Ascends to His Father. 	28:1-20	16:1-20	24:1-53	20:1–21:25

Sources: *New Testament Survey* (Merrill C. Tenney), *A Harmony of the Gospels* (A.T. Robertson), and the New King James Version.

LESSON 4

Quiz

True or false

Write or type in T if the statement is true and F if the statement is false.

1. _____ Jesus Christ came to earth as a last-minute remedy to deal with human sin.
 2. _____ Jesus Christ is the only human being to never sin.
 3. _____ The Bible indicates Jesus was born on Dec. 25.
 4. _____ Jesus Christ did not exist prior to His human birth.
 5. _____ Jesus Christ died to release humans from the penalty of sin if they repent.
-

Multiple choice

Select the correct answer to each question.

6. Why did Jesus often teach through parables?
 - a. to help people better understand His message
 - b. to entertain His audience
 - c. only because it was a common teaching style of His time
 - d. to hide the meaning of His words from those He wasn't calling
7. Jesus Christ's appearance as a Man can best be described as:
 - a. a typical first-century Jewish man
 - b. a man with long hair and a white robe
 - c. a man who noticeably stood out from the crowd as physically distinct
 - d. an extremely handsome and attractive man
8. What does John 1 call Jesus before He came to earth as a human being?
 - a. Gabriel
 - b. Michael
 - c. the Word
 - d. the Father

9. What was Jesus Christ involved in creating before His human birth?

- a. all things that exist
- b. only the earth
- c. only human beings
- d. nothing

10. How has Christ related to the Father for all eternity?

- a. He has supreme authority over the Father.
- b. He has always submitted to the Father's authority.
- c. He and the Father had no interaction.
- d. He claims equal authority to the Father and the Holy Spirit.

11. Which statement best describes how Jesus came to earth as a Man?

- a. He became a Man by willingly giving up His divine power and existence.
- b. He was a projection of God, but not truly flesh and blood.
- c. He was a spirit who remotely controlled a man's body.
- d. He came into existence at the moment He was conceived in Mary's womb.

12. What was *not* a reason Jesus came to earth?

- a. to reveal the Father to humanity
- b. to bear witness to the truth
- c. to set a perfect example for humans to follow
- d. to free mankind from the burden of keeping the 10 Commandments

13. John 3:16 reveals that Jesus Christ came to earth so that

- a. human beings could be freed from the bondage of the 10 Commandments.
- b. human beings could have an opportunity to receive eternal life.
- c. human beings could live their lives free from suffering.
- d. human beings could have an opportunity to go to heaven.

14. What did Jesus Christ say He would build in Matthew 16:18?

- a. a new temple
- b. a Christian nation
- c. His Church
- d. a resistance movement to the Romans

15. Which statement best describes Jesus' teaching on the 10 Commandments?

- a. He came to abolish the commandments.
- b. He came to show us how to keep the commandments.
- c. He came to offer grace as a replacement to the 10 Commandments.
- d. He did not address the commandments during His ministry.

16. How do biblical prophecies describe Jesus Christ's second coming?

- a. They describe Him returning quietly to a city in the United States.
- b. They describe Him returning to rapture His saints up to heaven.
- c. They describe Him returning metaphorically in the hearts of His people.
- d. They describe Him returning visibly and with great power.

17. How will Jesus Christ's return be announced to the world?

- a. by the blast of a trumpet
- b. by the total destruction of the earth
- c. by Him preaching in Jerusalem as a Man
- d. by the disappearance of Christians around the world

18. What will be the main purpose of Jesus Christ's return?

- a. to utterly destroy the earth
- b. to establish His Kingdom on the earth
- c. to rapture the saints to heaven
- d. to continue His physical ministry as a human being

19. How does the Bible describe the world's response to Jesus Christ's return?

- a. The majority of the world will mourn and fight Him.
- b. The majority of the world will welcome Him as a conquering King.
- c. There will be worldwide apathy toward His second coming.
- d. The majority of the world will not know He returned.

20. What role does the Bible describe Jesus currently having in heaven?

- a. King of Kings
- b. Prophet
- c. High Priest of the New Covenant
- d. Chief Archangel

CHECK YOURSELF

Lesson 4 Quiz

- | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|
| 1. F | 6. d | 11.a | 16.d |
| 2. T | 7. a | 12.d | 17.a |
| 3. F | 8. c | 13.b | 18.b |
| 4. F | 9. a | 14.c | 19.a |
| 5. T | 10.b | 15.b | 20.c |

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- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. E | 6. A |
| 2. H | 7. G |
| 3. B | 8. F |
| 4. J | 9. D |
| 5. C | 10. I |