A BIOGRAPHY OF JESUS

32 SIMPLE LESSONS FROM HIS LIFE

TOM J. COWLEY

ORDERED AROUND FOUR GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS OF CHRIST'S MINISTRY

NAZARETH	CAPERNAUM	JUDEA / PEREA	JERUSALEM
COME DOWN	COME FOLLOW	COME LIVE	COME HOME
From his birth through the beginning of his public ministry	The great Galilee ministry	After the Transfiguration until the Triumphal Entry	The most important week, the Passion to Pentecost
30 + 1 Years	1½ Years	6 Months	7 + 50 Days



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To my wife, Karen

For her encouragement in our partnership for life and our efforts to ensure that our children, their spouses, and our grandchildren know Jesus personally. May all of us grow in knowledge and relationship with Jesus.

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A Biography of Jesus: 32 Simple Lessons from His Life

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INTRODUCTION

My journey toward writing this book began in 1988 when our pastor, Ray Johnston, challenged those attending the first service in January to read the Bible cover to cover in the upcoming year. I took Ray up on his challenge. Over the course of that year I began to see how pieces of the Bible fit together. I became excited about bringing "order" to my previously "disconnected" parts of spiritual information.

Since that time my ministry has been to help others better understand the basic framework and ministry of the life of Jesus Christ. My approach is to organize and order the information in the Bible to make learning, memorization, and recall as easy as possible.

Teaching and preaching in a number of church settings and constant spiritual dialog with old and new friends led me to the conclusion that all people need to know more about the life and works of Jesus Christ. We all need to know Jesus. The Bible, and the life of Jesus in particular, is the story of God's plan for living life. A framework of his life can assist us on life's journey and bring our world closer to joy and peace.

Bible scholars sometimes note that we have only forty-five days of the life of Christ in the Bible's four Gospels. From this material, I have chosen thirty-two key events told around four geographic locations of his ministry to help you get a handle on the biography of Jesus—his life and teachings.

This book advances a simple, basic *journey* theology. There is very little dogma or doctrine promoted—just the life of a divinely human man who changed human history.

Much is written today about the historical Jesus. A problem I have is that much of this material challenges his divine nature and omits many miracles he accomplished. As we draw close to the human Jesus, we must also honor and worship his divine nature. For this reason the "bookends" of *A Biography of Jesus* are events 1 and 2 ("In the Beginning Was the Word" and "Infant Birth") and events 31 and 32 ("Tomb Is Empty" and "Teach and Talk").

In events 1 and 2 we read of God's decision to send his Son with God's Word through the Virgin Mary. In event 31, the tomb is empty, and he has risen! Event 32 shares the guidance of the risen Christ to his followers. He calls us to employ the power of the Holy Spirit to *teach and talk*. We are challenged to be his witnesses in a world that needs *more* of Jesus. These four bookend events are the cornerstone faith events for those who follow Jesus.

A Biography of Jesus is written to help you to order, understand, and remember the life of Jesus. You will meet Jesus through the thirty-two selected key events in various settings, as you walk with him and feel his challenges, joys, and concerns.

This book is "events driven." Why should we focus on events? We live in an event-driven information age. Overviews or summaries are a part of our twenty-two-minute newscasts. Often our commentators are trying to pack twenty or more

stories into brief sound bites. Politicians are scheduling photo opportunities to communicate messages. Organizations hire event planners to create themes. More in-depth coverage of subjects is always available to us, but we have adapted well to learning large amounts of material in smaller bites (or bytes).

We are constantly learning from events. How people behaved, what they said, and what they did lead to impressions. We draw values or truths about the lives and goals of people from events. By ordering the events in the life of Jesus in our minds, we can know him better and have a closer relationship with him.

As Rick Warren reminded us in *The Purpose-Driven Life*, we were "created to become like Christ." Jesus taught in the oral tradition: clearing temples, delivering sermons on mountainsides, eating in homes, performing miracles with impact, telling parables, and teaching through encounters with Jewish leaders. He wanted observers to take home and use his messages.

The thirty-two events of Christ's life presented in this book are grouped by each type of event. The three types of events are:

1. *a* GOD *event* An event that only God is big enough to pull off. Examples are God's decision in heaven to send his Son, the Virgin Birth, and Jesus's resurrection.

2. *an* IMPACT *event* An event that had great impact and created an impression on observers. Examples are miracles, healings, and clearing the Temple.

3. *a* TEACHING *event* Jesus as seen teaching in the oral tradition, using parables, conversing over meals, preaching, and so on. Some of the sermons of Jesus, his close dialog with disciples, and the private time Jesus spent coaching his disciples are examples of teaching events.

Three more important concepts shape this guide and are designed to further enhance your ability to remember this material quickly and easily. These are additional "handles" for your study:

1. Four basic geographic locations provide order and chronology to Jesus's life.

The "four locations" approach to the life of Jesus started while I was facilitating a group pilgrimage to Israel in 1998. On that trip our group traveled throughout the entire Holy Land. The area in which Jesus ministered is about 150 miles long and 50 miles wide. In my own attempt to process all of the information, during the trip I observed that Jesus's ministry focused around four basic geographic areas. Three of these four locations are cities:

- Nazareth (his early years through age thirty-one)
- Capernaum (the one-and-a-half-year great Galilee ministry); and
- Jerusalem (Passion Week).

The fourth location encompasses two provinces:

- Judea and Perea.

These provinces are divided by the Jordan River; I have named them (rather than cities) because Jesus and his disciples were constantly traveling from city to city in Judea and Perea. The group was on the move for a six-month period from his Transfiguration to the triumphal entry into Jerusalem for Passion Week.

These four "base camps" of Jesus's ministry provide an overall chronological grouping of events in the life of Jesus. This is unique in relation to other more academic works I have studied; however, it is a concept that I find many people can relate to. Base locations are associated with major moves in our own lives as we change careers, move across country, or go through other major life changes.

2. Memory theory helps us recall events to deepen our learning and reflection.

God has created us with a marvelous memory capability, which often goes untapped. The human brain has the capacity for ten trillion bits of information. How do we store and recall those facts? One way is by focusing our attention on *stories* or *narratives*. Most people can remember a story better than a random set of facts.

To assist in this, the thirty-two key events of Jesus's life in this book are "chunked" around the basic locations of Jesus's life using alliterations in the titles. You saw these first on the contents page, where each title within the four sections begins with the same letter. These alliterations are designed to further help you in retaining the information of his biography. You

may wish to develop your own additional word associations or visualizations for even greater recall. That is great! Use your mind to know Jesus better, retain key events, live his teachings, and share his biography.

3. The four locations of the ministry of Jesus open up the basics of Christian theology.

I remember once when Dr. Leonard Sweet delivered a sermon on the "Hour of Power" television service from the Crystal Cathedral Ministries. He shared a six-word simple theology: "Come Down, Come Out, and Come Home." With his kind permission, I have adapted Dr. Sweet's "simple theology" to eight words that are tied to the thirty-two events in this guide. They present a journey for us to discover and easily unpack the basics of Christian theology.

PLACE	SIMPLE THEOLOGY
Nazareth	Come down
Capernaum	Come follow
Judea/Perea	Come live
Jerusalem	Come home

You will find more on these four phrases of "journey theology" as the book progresses.

As you walk through the Gospels with me, focusing on thirty-two essential events in the life of Christ, I hope you will come to understand this journey theology more deeply. Jesus

came not only to save us but to help us develop purpose on life's journey. We are all invited by him to:

Come down
Come follow
Come live
and Come home.

For those who have not yet chosen to follow Jesus, my purpose in *A Biography of Jesus* is to provide an opportunity to read his life as a sequence of memorable events. Don't rely on what others have said; study his life, teachings, and claims on your own. Consider the decision to follow him, based upon study of his life. For those who have already made a decision to follow Jesus, I pray this guide will deepen your relationship, love, and friendship.

COME DOWN



From his birth

through the

beginning of his

public ministry

30 + 1 Years

7 Events


Zabulon
TRIBE
Nazareth
SHAM
SYRIA
Damascus
Sidon
Tyre
Ptolemais
Jerusalem
Bethlehem
Hebron
Jericho
Gaza
Joppa
Samaria
Shechem
Jezreel
Nazareth
Capernaum
Bethsaida
Chorazin
Cana
Tiberias
Nain
Endor
Naim
Nain
Nazareth
Mt. Tabor
Mt. Carmel
Mt. Hermon
Mt. Libanus
Mt. Antilibanus
Mt. Gilboa
Mt. Gilead
Mt. Hor
Mt. Nebo
Mt. Seir
Mt. Sinai
Mt. Horeb
Mt. Pisgah
Mt. Ebal
Mt. Gerizim
Mt. Olivet
Mt. Zion
Mt. Moriah
Mt. Quarantania
Mt. Ephraim
Mt. Judea
Mt. Paran
Mt. Sin

INTRODUCTION

NAZARETH is a city on a hill in Galilee. It overlooks the Jezreel Valley described in the Old Testament. Looking to the south on a clear day from Nazareth, you can see mounts Tabor, Moreh, and Gilboa. The village of Nain is also visible in the distance. Today Nazareth is primarily an industrial town housing an important automotive assembly plant. It is Israeli-occupied territory and has a large Arab (Islamic) influence.

Mary and Joseph journeyed from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the Roman imperial census when Jesus was born. They returned to Nazareth, after a brief stay in Egypt, to Joseph's carpentry business. As Matthew (2:23) notes, Jesus was called a Nazarene. Just as each of us has a hometown where we were brought up, Jesus could call Nazareth his hometown. It is interesting that the word *Nazarene* in Jesus's day was a synonym for "despised."

The seven events identified around Nazareth cover the longest period in his life, thirty-one years. IN's help us remember this first part of his life. For example, there was no room in the "Inn," and the baby Jesus was born in a humble Bethlehem stable, south of Jerusalem.

Of the seven events in this section, two are God events, four are impact events, and there is one teaching event. They are presented in chronological order.

1

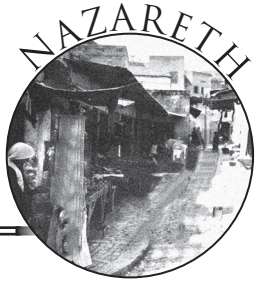
IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD

a GOD *event*

God made the decision in heaven to send his Son, Jesus, to earth with his Word for living.

GOD, since creation, had interest in sharing his Word with his people. Moses conveyed God's law, the Ten Commandments, on Mount Sinai, but the Hebrew nation had trouble understanding and observing God's law. God decided on a different plan to share his Word, or Logos. He would send his son, Jesus, with the New Covenant for people. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14a). John affirms the divine (yet fully human) nature of Jesus.

Later the apostle Paul says, "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son" (Galatians 4:4a). Hellenistic culture



(common Greek language and philosophy) and Roman advancements (transportation progress and roads) provided the "backdrop" for God to *fulfill* his promised Messiah. Think of the celebration in heaven! God had decided the fullness of time had arrived! God would send his Son with the Word. What is known as the Messianic Age begins with the coming of Jesus to the earth.

The Word (Logos) was to be fully human and dwell among us. God must have been disappointed that centuries of working with his chosen people, the Hebrews, had not produced much fruit. So he decided that the time had come for his Son, Jesus, to become flesh and dwell among people to share his Word.

The importance of proclaiming this Good News that God's Word came from heaven to visit the earth is still vitally important for our lives today.

Refer to: *John 1:1–18*

Question: If you were God and frustrated with centuries of trying to have your message for humankind communicated, what would you have done to secure the attention of people?