

# LESSON 1

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## INTRODUCING THE LIFE OF CHRIST; THE PERIOD OF CHRIST'S LIFE PRIOR TO HIS MINISTRY, PART 1

### INTRODUCTION

We are beginning a study of the life of Jesus Christ as told in the first four books of the New Testament, each of which is named after its author. This study brings together the four accounts of His life into one story. All of the four accounts have the same basic purpose—to reveal Jesus—but each was written from a slightly different point of view, apparently appealing to a somewhat different audience.

Early readers of the Gospel Accounts were familiar with the world into which Jesus came, but most of us are not. Much change had occurred in this world in the years between the Old Testament and the New Testament record. However, the fact that the period between the Testaments was a time of prophetic silence does not mean that we can know nothing of the years that shaped Jesus' world. We have several sources of information, including The Apocrypha, the writings of Josephus, archaeological findings, and even the Scriptures themselves.

Regarding the world into which Jesus came, let us conclude by noticing the prophecy that the Messiah would grow up “like a root out of parched ground” (Is. 53:2). From this inhospitable environment, Christ would come. Nevertheless, the religion of Jesus would ultimately grow and spread throughout the world. [See *Life of Christ, 1*, pp. 1–26.]

1. Why did God inspire four accounts of the same gospel?
2. Can the Gospel Accounts be classified as biographies? Why or why not?
3. How can the differences between the accounts be explained?
4. Can the four Gospel Accounts be depended upon as accurate?
5. Why is it important to have an understanding of the world into which Jesus was born?

6. How did the Roman world set the stage for and influence the spread of Christianity?
7. In what ways did Jewish religion change between the times of the Old and New Testaments?
8. What expectations did Jewish people have for the Messiah?

#### **LUKE'S PREFACE AND DEDICATION (LK. 1:1-4)**

Evidently, there was, at the time of Luke's writing, a basic body of beliefs about Jesus that was common to all the church. A main purpose of Luke's presentation of Christ's life was to help Theophilus know "the exact truth" about Jesus. Luke might be thought of as Christianity's first formal "critic." He did not simply accept the various accounts that were circulating. Rather, he thoroughly checked the facts. Thus what he wrote was "exact." [See *Life of Christ, 1*, pp. 35-36.]

9. In what ways do these verses insinuate that basic beliefs about Christ were already common to the church?
10. How did Luke intend for his gospel account to differ from some others that had been attempted?
11. What does Luke's focus on consecutive order most likely mean?

#### **JOHN'S INTRODUCTION (JN. 1:1-18)**

John said that Jesus was the *logos*—"the Word"—prior to His earthly existence. The apostle John also used *logos* in other writings to refer to Jesus (see 1 Jn. 1:1; Rev. 1:2; 19:13). He was the only New Testament writer to use this term to refer to Christ. As the *logos*, Christ came to this earth as the Word of God personified.

The most thought-provoking part of John's introduction is verse 14: And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.... John also had more to say in his introduction; however, his focus was on the reality of Christ's preexistence. [See *Life of Christ, 1*, pp. 36-39.]

12. What did John emphasize by not beginning his account of Christ's life with His birth?

13. By what names did John refer to Jesus when describing the time before His earthly ministry?
14. What purpose did Jesus serve by being the Word of God in the flesh?
15. Why was it necessary for the Word to become flesh?

### **THE GENEALOGIES OF JESUS (MT. 1:1–17; LK. 3:23–38)**

The Book of Matthew has no formal preface as do the Books of Luke and John. Rather, Matthew immediately stressed that Jesus was the Messiah for whom the Jews had been looking. Luke also gives a genealogy, but it is not found at the beginning of the book. Matthew's and Luke's accounts of Jesus' genealogy are strikingly different. Both show that Jesus was a descendant of Abraham (Mt. 1:2; Lk. 3:34) and David (Mt. 1:6; Lk. 3:31), but most of the other names in the two lists are different. [See *Life of Christ*, 1, pp. 39–44.]

16. What does Matthew stress by opening his gospel with a family tree?
17. Why have some generations of names been left out of Matthew's genealogy?
18. Why are some of the names surprising to find in this list?
19. What relationship did Luke establish with his genealogy of Christ?
20. Why are most of the names in these two genealogies different?