



A Course

In

**GENERAL
BIBLE**

PART FOUR

Prepared by the
Committee on Religious Education
of the
American Bible College

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BIBLE

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INTRODUCTION

THE FOUR GOSPELS

The name Gospel is from "God" and "spell", the Anglo-Saxon words meaning good news.

The gospels are independent accounts of the life of Jesus, each having incidents that the others do not. Yet, these four narratives do not conflict with one another. The scholar, A. Anderson, set to work to read each Gospel separately, trying not to think of any other representation of Christ than that which he was then reading. What he found was four pictures of Jesus, but it was the same Jesus seen from different inspired writers.

Jesus Christ is everywhere and always consistently portrayed as "true God, begotten of the Father, from eternity and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, my Lord Who has redeemed me lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the Devil, not with gold or silver but with His holy, precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death, in order that I might be His own, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity." (Luther's "Smaller Catechism")

The first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke have much in common and are called the "Synoptic Gospels". The word "synoptic" comes from the Greek *synopsis* which means "seeing together." These books are largely concerned with Jesus' ministry in Galilee and do not report fully Jesus' work in Judea and Jerusalem. All of the events in the book of Mark are found in Matthew and in Luke. And there is information in Luke that is not in Matthew. Matthew and Mark have the most in common. Matthew and Luke give us information about Christ's birth and early years. Both Matthew and Luke quote another source that scholars have named "The Sayings of Jesus." It was a body of material that was passed on by oral tradition among believers. The Apostles were the first authorities on Jesus' life. Then the eye-witnesses who began following Jesus beginning with John's baptism. As eye-witnesses began to die off, written testimony became necessary. When the Apostles died, a written authority was necessary. The fourth gospel was written last of all and supplements the three others. This gospel is chiefly concerned with Jesus' ministry in Judea. The synoptic Gospels and John are the Church's authoritative word on the life and ministry of Jesus. The Holy Spirit uniquely used these writers as He inspired them to pen our New Testament Gospels.

Matthew was an apostle of Jesus. He was a Jew and his father was Alpheus. Before his conversion he was called Levi and was a tax collector of customs and tolls on people and goods crossing the Lake of Capernaum. He heard with his own ears the discourses of Jesus and was with our Lord on His journeys.

Matthew wrote especially for Jewish readers and in his account he seeks to prove that Jesus is the promised King-Messiah foretold by the prophets. His book contains many allusions to Old Testament prophecies as fulfilled. "Now all of this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet. . . ." Matt. 1:22. Matthew's genealogy of Christ shows that He is the son of Abraham and of David and is legal heir to the throne. His kingly character is traced from birth to the final triumph in the resurrection.

Mark was a companion of Paul and Barnabas on their first journey. He was also a good friend and companion of Peter from whom he received an account of many things recorded in his gospel. On the basis that only Mark in 14:51,52 is the only writer to record this, some commentators feel that this was Mark and thus Simon Peter's sister's son. His mother Mary's house in Jerusalem was a refuge of the early Christian church. His book is short and vivid. He presents Jesus as a mighty King and a servant King. His readers were Gentiles and Romans so Mark deals with Jesus' earthly acts. No genealogy is given as none was needed in writing to Gentiles as they could not appreciate a Jewish Messiah. The main thought is "divine power ministering to men and at the same time attesting Christ's claim of the Son of God. It is the history of the war of Jesus against the mighty powers of sin and evil in the world; in which He is victorious." Sell

Luke was a doctor and a faithful companion of Paul. His genealogy of Christ is traced to Adam, the progenitor of the whole race, to connect Him with the human race and not merely with Israel. Luke writes for the Greeks who were an educated and philosophical people, "and in their speculations had conceived of man approaching God

Himself in perfection. He presents Christ as the Son of Man, the perfect Man, in Whom are found all the virtues of man and woman. This man is God the Savior of men. " Norlie

John, was the brother of James, a son of Zebedee. He was one of the earliest disciples and is called the beloved disciple of Jesus (John 21:20,24). He wrote long after the other gospels were written. He traces Christ to God and Christ is not only shown to have been with God in the beginning but to be God. It is a discourse from the beginning to the end about the divinity of Christ. John's purpose in writing his Gospel as found in 20:31 is to win Gentiles to Christ as in a gospel tract.

CHAPTER ONE

DIVINE TIMING

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Christians in Galatia refers to the birth of Christ as having taken place in a pre set period which he designated as the "fulness of time", Gal. 4:4. The proper time had come; the conditions of the world were right for God's supreme revelation, "the Word made Flesh." It was the ideal time due to the Roman Pax and Peace, the Koine Greek language and Jewish expectations for the Messiah. Many of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah referred to His birth and birthplace. Keen anticipation had captured the minds of the oppressed and suffering Jews during the period of silence between the Testaments. They looked longingly and hopefully for the Deliverer. They were ready to receive the good news of His advent. Reflections upon the Life of Christ cover many areas. Not the least of these is the perfect timing and the appropriate hour in which He was introduced into the world. There is no doubt that God planned that He should appear at this hour and so prepared the way for Him as specifically outlined in the eternal past.

1. The Fulness of Time Politically. If Christ had come a century earlier, his message would have been blocked on land by closed national frontiers, on the ocean by pirates who made the seas impassable. Moreover, had Christ come a few centuries after, he would have found civilization too preoccupied with its struggles against the barbarian hordes from the north, to have any interest in the gospel. But Christ came at a time when the Roman peace held the world, albeit with an iron hand. Rome had unified the civilized world.

Besides the relative peace, the great roads of the Empire contributed to the world's unification. From end to end of the Empire, the highways ran triumphs of Roman engineering. Along these roads built to carry Caesar's legions, the Gospel message would be carried. Language was another factor in the world unity. While each province had its own dialect, all knew Greek. In the heights of Galatia as much as on the streets of Athens, in Spain as in Rome the

missionaries could speak Greek knowing that they would be understood.

2. The Fulness of Time Economically. Beneath the shining culture and luxury of that time unrest was seething and poverty was rampant. Two out of every three people in Rome were slaves and in many parts of Caesar's dominions the economic situation had reached a critical point when Jesus came. Indeed this was the case in Palestine. The disastrous aftermath of war, the colossal extravagance of Herod the Great, the burden of taxation, both civil and religious, the growing over-population which made it impossible for the land to provide sufficient food for its own inhabitants -- all these had precipitated a period of deep depression among the majority of the people. Life had become full of worry and anxiety

4. The Fulness of Time Morally. Swinburne in one of his poems protests that since the coming of Christ the world has never known the same lightheartedness again; that until then the Greco-Roman world had been perfectly happy, innocent and contented in its Nature worship, its worship of Zeus, Dionysus and Aphrodite; and that Jesus really spoiled everything: "Thou hast conquered O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath." But this is of course, very untrue. Historically, it is nonsense, for the idea of an ancient world being happy, innocent, lighthearted and morally at peace is a myth. The true picture is given by Paul in Romans, chapter one.

4. The Fulness of Time Religiously. The old gods were either dead or dying and to fill the gap two expedients were tried. On one hand a complete new batch of gods were imported from the East till amongst the philosophers the overcrowding of Olympus the dwelling place of the gods became a standing joke. On the other hand the strange phenomenon of Caesar-worship appeared i.e. the Emperor himself was accorded divine honors. But all expedients failed. What was a whole parthenon of gods worth if they had nothing to say to a man with a broken heart? What could the divinity of Caesar say

to a soul stabbed with the remorse of sin? The hearts of men remained unsatisfied. In many parts of the world, men of deeper nature and spiritual vision were waiting expectantly for someone to lighten the darkness. Amongst the Jews the hope of the Messiah was clearer than it had been for centuries. The mass of Jewish literature from the period between the Testaments is full of hope. The Jews took their Messianic dream with them wherever they went.

The Jew championed the cause of Monotheism, the belief of only one God. They had been chosen or "elected" to propagate and perpetuate the knowledge of the One True God. Through the centuries they had accepted their position and mission and in a majority of instances responded with vision and sincerity. There were times however under divergent circumstances that they suffered spiritual lapses. During such intervals they were chastened by Jehovah and then restored. After deliverance from the Babylonish captivity, they were freed from idol worship and returned to the pure faith and religion of their ancestors. When Christ was born, the Jews were widely scattered. Through the medium of dispersing His people throughout the world, Jehovah brought all nations into contact with the monotheistic persuasion. Idols were replaced by mysticism. The Jewish people believed in, taught and lived a monotheistic philosophy.

The ultimate hope of Jewry was the arrival of the promised Messiah, their Deliverer. Students of Old Testament history had glimpses of the One whom God would send as far back as Genesis 3:15. The numerous times which they had endured ignominious treatment and suffering the personal servitude to which they had been subjected and the national calamities which they had encountered, all seemed to lead them to look to Jehovah for the One who would bring them release from the bonds of Rome. Among both Jews and the heathen there was a definite air of dissatisfaction and discontent. The heathen had witnessed and in some instances embraced a religion of culture and emperor worship. It had left them disillusioned and despairing. The absolute corruption of the system caused them to yearn for purity. There was a deep desire for that which would capture and satisfy the more noble and higher ardent wishes of the mind and life. In all actuality, they were ready for the Son of God to appear.

5. The Date. The birth of Christ is traditionally and popularly associated with December 25, 4 B.C. The observance of December 25 is traceable back only as far as the early fourth century; its adoption at that time was connected with that acceptance of

pagan feast days into the Church ritual which took place when Christianity began to supersede paganism as the state religion of the Roman empire. The 4 B.C. date was derived by early chronologers from the date of Herod's death. The difference between 4 B.C. and 0 B.C.-A.D. is the Julius Caesar's calendar versus the Gregorian calendar; the Gregorian missed it by 4 years. Some suggest that this is incorrect and contend that there is better evidence that Jesus was born at the end of September in the year 2 B.C. This evidence rests upon the testimony of early Christian writers and some on deductions from Luke's gospel.

Jesus was born just before the death of Herod the Great. According to Josephus, Herod reigned 37 years. Herod became king in 37 B.C. so that his death must have been within a few months of the change from B.C. to A.D. Discussing the events which led up to Herod's death, Josephus records his execution of certain patriots who had pulled down a golden eagle which he had erected in the Temple, and comments that on that particular night there was an eclipse of the moon. Attempts to fix this eclipse astronomically originally led to the conclusion that an eclipse of March 13, 4 B.C. was the one indicated and this is why Herod's death is customarily assigned to that year, although this violates the dating of a number of other incidents in his reign. Later research has established that an eclipse occurring on Dec. 29, 1 B.C. meets the relevant requirements more accurately and is almost certainly the one to which Josephus referred. Matthew's gospel tells that Joseph took the child Jesus into Egypt, "and was there until the death of Herod" so that Christ's birth in late 2 B.C. about a year before Herod's death, fits in very well.

According to Luke's account of the Nativity, Jesus was born during a census carried out in Syria by Quirinius, (Cyrenius) Luke 2:2. Josephus refers to a census conducted by Quirinius in A.D. 6, which is too late to be associated with Jesus' birth. However, from Roman records found in Antioch, it is now known that Quirinius was military governor in Syria for two terms 4-1 B.C. and A.D. 6-1 and he conducted a census on both occasions.

6. Rise of the Herod Family. The tyranny of the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes had brought about the political revolt of the Maccabees and the organization of the religious sect later to be known as the Pharisees. This organization took a firm stand for the purity of Judaism and opposed the high priestly house, known as the Sadducees, which was worldly and inclined to accept Hellenism and the demands of the Syrian kings. Their views were to bend with the times, whereas the Pharisees held to tradition.

During the theocratic rule, the Pharisees gained popularity with both the common people and the rulers but because of their strict rules and claims of superior morality they were despised by the cultured and wealthy class. In the course of time, the Pharisees began adding new ordinances to the law and became quite politically minded. In their attempts to dictate to the high priest, he broke with them and joined the Sadducees. The change of affairs resulted in civil war. The Romans intervened to arbitrate the dispute. The final outcome was that Jerusalem was taken and Judea came under Roman power in 6 B.C. The Romans appointed the high priest Hyrcanus ethnarch or governor.

Antipater, the governor of Idumea and the father of Herod, was an extraordinary man being shrewd, aggressive and friendly to Rome. For services rendered to the Roman Government, he was made head of the finances of Judea. Antipater was also a friend of the high priest Hyrcanus. These two men sided with Pompey in his war against Julius Caesar. But when Caesar defeated Pompey, they prudently transferred their allegiance to Caesar. For this act of good faith, Caesar confirmed Hyrcanus as hereditary high priest and made Antipater a Roman citizen and procurator of Judea. Caesar was kind to the Jews; he exempted them from tribute during their Sabbath year and left their religious customs untouched. According to Josephus the Jews living in Alexandria were even recognized as Roman citizens.

7. Herod the Great. (Ruled from 37 B.C. to c. 1 B.C.) Now being in favor with Rome and gaining power in Judea, Antipater put his sons in places of power. Phasaelus (Phasaël) was made governor of Jerusalem and Herod was given charge of Galilee.

With the assassination of Julius Caesar, civil war ensued. Antipater backed Lucius Cassius and the Jews were heavily taxed to support his cause. Herod in Galilee was so zealous in raising funds that Cassius appointed him general of both land and sea forces in Coele-Syria. But Mark Anthony defeated both Brutus and Cassius and went east to re-establish Roman power. The Jews sent an embassy to Anthony to request a restoration of the theocracy under the high priest, but these petitions were disregarded.

Anthony went to Egypt to be with Cleopatra and in Palestine Antigonus the Maccabean headed a revolt against Roman authority. With the Parthian army as his ally, he attacked the palace in Jerusalem. Herod escaped to Rome and with his diplomatic ability and noted charm won the support to Anthony

and Octavius. Herod was appointed king and given several legions of Roman soldiers to take Judea from Antigonus. In a little less than four years, Herod was master of all Judea. Antigonus was beheaded and thus passed the last hope of the Maccabean dynasty. During his siege of Jerusalem, Herod married the beautiful Mariamme, the last of the family of the Hasmonaeans.

Herod was a farsighted statesman, a builder of great cities and splendid buildings. He restored the Temple to a splendor undreamed of since King Solomon. Under him Hellenism increased. Jerusalem had theaters, amphitheaters, games and a gymnasium. Being just like the Greek cities in this respect, the heathen population increased. At the beginning of his reign, the Pharisees had favored him against Antigonus and the Sadducees, so Herod reorganized the Sanhedrin under Pharisaic influence. Further he broke the power of the Sadducaic aristocracy by executing forty of their leaders.

He was a cruel and vindictive tyrant. In order to strengthen his political position he murdered all possible rivals. Among those were his father-in-law, brother-in-law, one of his wives and three of his sons. No wonder then that he ordered the slaughter of the infants at the news of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. During his rule some Jews despairing of the coming of the Messiah formed the political party called the Zealots. They resorted to revolution as the means of righting the wrongs in Judea.

8. Herod's Sons. At his death Herod bequeathed his dominions to three of his sons. While Herod's sons did not have the confidence of Rome, as did their father, out of regard for his old friend Augustus confirmed the will, though not until the family had brought their case before him in Rome.

Archelaus was given the most important part of Herod's kingdom which included Samaria and Judea. So greatly did the Jews hate Archelaus that they petitioned to be incorporated in the province of Syria. Caesar Augustus decided against the Jews for a time but after ten years of "barbarous and tyrannical usage of the Jews", he was again accused before the emperor. Archelaus had crucified 1,000 Pharisees by covering them with tar and burned them. This time the Jews won and Augustus banished Archelaus to Gaul. During this time Jesus was growing into boyhood. After the deposition of Archelaus in 6 A.D. Judea, Samaria and Idumea were consolidated into the Roman province of Judea and was ruled by agents called **procurators**.

Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee is the Herod of the Gospels. He wanted to see Jesus and on one occasion tried to kill Him, Luke 13:31. It was to Antipas that Pilate sent Jesus during his trial. Antipas ruled for more than forty years so he must have been cunning in his dealings with Rome. He was a great favorite of the emperor Tiberius in whose honor he built the city Tiberias.

He is remembered mainly for his ignoble deeds of marrying his niece and causing the death of John the Baptist. His rightful marriage was to the daughter of the Arabian king Aretas. But on a trip to Rome he fell in love with Herodias, his half-brother Philip's wife (not to be confused with Philip, ruler of Ituraea and Trachonitis). Herodias was the daughter of Aristobulus, a murdered son of Herod the Great and sister of Herod Agrippa. Herodias and Agrippa were grandchildren of Mariamme the last of the family of the priest-kings of Judah. When John the Baptist denounced this marriage and fell victim to Herodias' plot, tensions grew in Palestine. Then Aretas attacked the roundly defeated Herod making it necessary for Vitellius, the governor of Syria to intervene. When Tiberius died in A.D. 37, Herod Antipas boldly petitioned Caius Caligula for the title king, but Herod Agrippa who was a good friend of the emperor aroused enough suspicions to secure Antipas deposition. Both Herod and Herodias were exiled.

Agrippa I and Agrippa II were the last of the Herods. Both men tried to combine Judaism with Greek culture. It was Agrippa I who killed James the brother of John and imprisoned Peter. He is the Herod in Acts 12. Agrippa II is the Herod to whom Paul delivered his address while he was in prison in Caesarea This Herod lived to see the final ruin of his country though he did try to stave off the Jews from rebelling.

9. Roman Procurators. As previously mentioned in 6 A.D. procurators were placed over Judea. These were agents of Rome who headed the administration of the system of taxes and customs. The customs formed an intricate system for swindling and oppressing the people. The procurator also had military power at his disposal. This he used to keep down any rebellions. The judicial power of capitol punishment fell in their domain also. Ordinary cases were tried by the Sanhedrin.

Pontius Pilate was the fifth procurator. He was a ruthless and obstinate person. He continually offended the Jews. Josephus records that he caused great indignation by introducing Roman standards

into Jerusalem. To the Jews, these were heathen devices as they bore the emperor's likeness on a medallion and were cult objects receiving the soldier's oaths of loyalty. Out of respect for the Jews religion, the Romans did not carry their standards into Jerusalem, but Pilate chose to disregard this practice. The Jews sent a deputation to Pilate asking that the Holy City not be so desecrated; he first refused to remove the hated standards, but later was forced to back down and have them removed. He further offended the people by using Temple money to build an aqueduct. Luke records that he massacred some Galileans in the Temple, Luke 13:1. Later he cruelly suppressed a Samaritan revolt and was recalled to Rome; ending his cruel and blundering career.

Originally the office of high priest was held for life and descended from father to son. But after the days of the Maccabees, the office was held by any man of priestly birth and could be changed by the rulers. The procurators changed the high priest so often that John speaks of the "high priest for that same year." (John 11:49,51). Despite the insecurity of his office the high priest had great political and economic power.

END OF SAMPLE