

---

# The Greatest Life Ever Lived

A Study in the Incarnate Life of Jesus Christ and An Exposition of the Four Gospels

LESSON I : INTRODUCTION

---

## GENERAL PERSONAL INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

These lessons were originally presented to the adult Sunday School class at Park Layne Baptist Church, beginning September 1, 1996.

I will attempt each week to supply a set of notes, not unlike what you received today. Occasionally there will be maps, outlines copied from other sources, overlays, etc. Note the spiral bound holes in the papers for your convenience.

Presenting the life of Christ in a chronological fashion demands that we skip around throughout the gospel narratives. I do intend however to cover every verse in the gospels, and perhaps as we get further along in our studies I will provide a reference chart listing the verse and where our comments may be found. This reference guide may then be updated every month or quarter.

I have come to value “important truths” and have hopefully learned to separate those truths from non-vital issues. I have grown to be more charitable [ my brother would label it “liberal” ] and am not as argumentative as I once was. As I study, I have often found how other opinions may have been formed, even if I do not agree with them. As we go through the gospels, I will attempt to give as many of the interpretations as I am familiar with. Many times you may hear me comment, **“This is what I believe, this is what others believe that is a viable or non-essential alternative, this is what some believe and is an important error.”** I think it’s the middle comment that makes the difference between being narrow-minded and being charitable.

Bottom line to my open-mindedness: ***I don’t have all the answers!*** As we go through the gospels, I will be studying these as well, therefore : (a) will try best to answer or find the answer to all questions (b) notes may change as I come across items, although I won’t be passing out new sets every Sunday. If you begin collecting these, it may be worthwhile to get a complete set upon our completion (whenever that will be).

***Please pray for these lessons, the teacher, and the listeners!*** *There is nothing magical about the word of God, regardless of the version being used. The key is to understand (the teacher’s responsibility) and to receive the word with a submissive, obedient heart (the listener’s responsibility).* I have no intention of entertaining the class, nor do I intend to waste the class’ time; rather I will do my best to present the life of Christ in as simple, as understandable, as thorough, and as practical manner as possible. One of my goals is to make the listener *miss* the lesson when one cannot attend. I want one to know that if they come, they will be fed a healthy diet of God’s Word, and when they cannot come, it is guaranteed that they will be losing out on a spiritual meal. { Example: a friend which studied “transubstantiation” and later used the information in witnessing to a Catholic; items such as the last half of Mark 16, the “floating chapter” of John 7, etc. -- ***we cannot bury our heads to truth***; that is the response of Catholics, cults, the lady Pastor works with who would “rather remain ignorant”, *and some Baptists!* }

## TERMINOLOGY

***incarnation:*** from root meaning “flesh”, refers to the Son of God becoming man -- John 1:1-4, 14

***new testament:*** the “new covenant” -- “For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance - now that He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.” Heb 9:16

***Christ:*** from Gk word “*christos*” = Heb “*messiah*”; both of which mean “anointed” or “the anointed One”

***gospel:*** “glad tidings” in the sense that it’s a message of deliverance; from old English “godspel (gōd “good” + spell “tidings”) which is translated from Latin evangelium, which came from Gk euangelion “good tidings”; used by some in the sense of “the story concerning God” which is probably the source for our calling the stories of Jesus “the gospels” -- note in NT the word never referred to a book but rather to the message being preached

***synoptic:*** “taking a common view” from Gk synoptikos (from syn = together, with + optikos = sight); refers to the first 3 gospel narratives due to their similarities in contents, order, and statement; universally (?) agreed that John wrote his gospel later as a supplement (note we will view all the gospels together as a single unit)

***harmony:*** A harmony does not “harmonize” the narratives but merely presents the sections from the gospels side-by-side for comparison’s sake. The first harmony of the gospels known is that of the *Diatessaron*, or “Harmony of the Four”, constructed prior to 170 AD by a man named Tatian.

***synoptic problem:*** There has always been a problem ever since the three gospels appeared together in the NT, and it is worth noting that even 1900 years later, the problem still remains unsolved. No one could read the gospels without noticing their similarities and differences, so the question arises as to the relationship of each of the gospels and their origins. (for example, compare Matt 5:1 with Luke 6:17) The most important theories are as follows:

(1) *oral tradition*. Briefly: each gospel writer wrote independently of each other and derived the substance of their writings solely by oral narratives of the sayings / doings of Jesus. Although still held by some, this view has chiefly been abandoned.

(2) *mutual use*. Briefly: one gospel was used by the other two writers as the main source. In this theory, each gospel has been placed first, second, and third. In fact, every possible combination has been taught at one time or another. Still held by some today, although it is universally conceded that Luke could not have been the primary source, and Mark could not have been the third gospel writer.

(3) *sources*. Probably held by most bible students today. Briefly: there was probably two main sources for the gospel writers, the first being the gospel of Mark or one like Mark's gospel; the second being designated *Q* (from the German word *quelle* = "source") which accounts for the similar material in Matthew and Luke that is not found in Mark.

(4) *other sources*. Going a step farther, something must explain the material in Matthew and Luke's writings which are not found in Mark or *Q*. There is discussion today as to "L" being the source of Luke's peculiar sections, often of medical or Gentile interest. Matthew's source is called "M" and is of course of Jewish interest.

Along with the sources is a question of order of events: who's order is correct? Note Matthew often deserts Mark's order, and Luke does too sometimes, but Luke and Matthew never depart in order together; and whenever they do, the remaining gospel agrees with Mark's order. For example, if Mark's topics could be numbered 1-2-3-4-5, Matthew's same five topics may be ordered as 1-3-2-4-5 and Luke's could be ordered 1-2-3-5-4. (Note this make a chronological look at the life of Christ difficult, and by no means should these studies be looked upon as authoritative.) According to one commentary, Catholicism and some Protestants believe Matthew's was the first written and followed by the others; most Protestant and Baptist scholars believe Mark's gospel was first.

It is important to note that the gospels are not alone with this problem / situation: *compare 2 Peter 2 and the book of Jude*. It is also worth noting that although there has been and are unanswerable questions due to the differences between the synoptic gospels, *it would be worse if there were no problems*. For three men to write in different areas at different times concerning events that occurred between 25 - 50 years earlier ... and to perfectly agree in every statement and every detail? That would strongly suggest colaberation between the authors, not each freely writing to each group as led by the Spirit of God. The answer we must trust in is a balance between 2 Peter 1:16-21 and John 14:26.

Benefits of this teaching: (1) it helps in our understanding of NT era; (2) helps in our understanding of how God used men to give us His word.