

JESUS

The New Way

With Dr. Tom Wright

Leader's Guide and Program Scripts

This guide prepared by
Denise George

**CHRISTIAN HISTORY
INSTITUTE**

P.O. Box 540
Worcester, PA 19490
Phone: (610) 584-3500
Fax: (610) 584-6643
E-mail: glimpses@chinstitute.org
Web: www.chinstitute.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome and Introduction to the Series	4
Program 1: Getting the Kingdom Started	
Program Scripts.....	6
Questions for Review.....	14
For Deeper Examination and Study	15
Questions for Deeper Discussion.....	18
Program 2: Announcing the Kingdom	
Program Scripts.....	19
Questions for Review.....	27
For Deeper Examination and Study	28
Questions for Deeper Discussion.....	31
Program 3: Longing for a King	
Program Scripts.....	32
Questions for Review.....	40
For Deeper Examination and Study	41
Questions for Deeper Discussion.....	45
Program 4: Why Did Jesus Die?	
Program Scripts.....	46
Questions for Review.....	54
For Deeper Examination and Study	55
Questions for Deeper Discussion.....	59
Program 5: Who Was Jesus?	
Program Scripts.....	60
Questions for Review.....	68
For Deeper Examination and Study	69
Questions for Deeper Discussion.....	72
Program 6: The New Claim	
Program Scripts.....	73
Questions for Review.....	81
For Deeper Examination and Study	82
Questions for Deeper Discussion.....	86
Appendices	
A: Jewish Resistance Events and Movements	87
B: Judas Maccabaeus Reclaims and Cleanses the Temple	88
C: Jewish Views of Resurrection.....	89
D: Destruction of the Temple	90
Additional Resources: Videos and Books	94

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

ON HOW TO USE THIS SERIES

FROM DR. KEN CURTIS, PRODUCER AND DIRECTOR OF THE VIDEO SERIES

What a joy it has been to spend considerable time with Dr. Tom Wright as we planned and then produced this six-part video series on Jesus! It has been one of the most stimulating and blessed experiences of my life.

In the planning stage I discovered something that has been borne out in the reports of others who have previewed these materials. I am confident that you will find the same true for you and your group. I refer to the fact that this material simply cannot be absorbed in one viewing.

Dr. Wright is a gifted and clear communicator, and you will have no trouble following him as he guides us through each program. But you soon will come to realize that it is only after the second or third pass that you begin to see the larger picture and make the connections that are implicit in his presentation.

Thus, I request that you, the leader, might want to view the entire series on your own before preparing your schedule for use. Further, I would urge that you find a way to make the video materials available for private viewing for group members during the week or at the conclusion of the group use of the programs. (Obviously a key concern is that the tapes be returned on time if they are loaned out during the week between the group showings.)

Some will need to confine the programs to a six-week curriculum. Others will want to expand the series to cover twelve or thirteen weeks. (Make the thirteenth week, if you are fitting this into a quarterly schedule, an Introduction, or Conclusion session.)

If you elect to go for the larger 12- or 13-week schedule, then you have another choice to make. That is, whether you prefer to show a complete program in session one and then have the rest of the time available in session one plus all of the time in session two to discuss that program, etc. Or you may prefer to show only half of the program in week one and use the remaining time to deal with that half, and then show the second half the next week, etc. Each program runs close to thirty minutes. For your convenience, should you prefer the method of breaking up each program into two parts, we have suggested convenient break points for each program that you will find on the opposite page.

Dr. Wright has indeed done ground-breaking work, and he is regarded as one of the leading New Testament scholars alive today. His contribution has been invaluable in countering the cynical skepticism that has held such sway in much of the world of scholarship over the past two hundred years. The title we have chosen for the series, we hope, is suggestive of that which you are about to experience. When we refer to *Jesus: The New Way*, there is a double intention. First, there is the awareness developed so capably by Tom Wright, that Jesus indeed fulfilled the deepest hopes and prayers of Israel, but in a new way that they did not expect. (Thus, we are eager to show this series to Jewish friends with the expectation that they will see who Jesus was and what he said in perhaps a "new way.") But there may also be treasures for Christians who have been followers of Jesus for many years. There is much here for you to consider that will deepen and enrich your understanding of and relationship with Jesus. As we were preparing this series, we were constantly reminded that it was like seeing some-

one you have loved for years with new eyes.

In his introduction to *The New Testament People of God*, Tom Wright comments in a way we do not normally expect of scholars. He says, "I frequently tell my students that quite a high proportion of what I say is probably wrong, or at least flawed or skewed in some way which I do not at the moment realize. The only problem is that I do not know which bits are wrong." This series is sent forth with the same spirit. We think you will find much that will challenge your thinking, and maybe even your praying, into new areas, but with no pretense that the contents herein are the last word. Indeed our hope is that they stimulate you and your group to dig deeper in the Scriptures and find your own even deeper riches in that fathomless Word.

In the pages that follow you will find the full scripts of Tom's presentations. They are somewhat expanded from what is in the final video as we had to edit for time at some points. This allows you to go back and recheck what you heard on the video for further discussion or reflection. The scripts are accompanied by additional notes in the margins at appropriate places for further background on specific subjects.

There is a section for each program with review questions that we supply as a resource that you may want to adapt for your own discussion group time.

Then, particularly for those who plan a 12- or 13-week program, there is a section with further material for deeper study, followed by more questions.

May you share the joy in using these materials that we have found in preparing them for you!

**HERE ARE THE SUGGESTED BREAK POINTS FOR EACH PROGRAM
IF YOU ELECT TO SPLIT IN TWO FOR VIEWING PURPOSES:**

Program	Title	Approx. Time	Breaker Title
1	Getting the Kingdom Started	13:50	The Essene Community and the Dead Sea Scrolls
2	Announcing the Kingdom	13:55	The New Challenge
3	Longing for a King	14:40	The Wicked Tenants
4	Why Did Jesus Die?	13:37	Riddles of the Cross
5	Who Was Jesus?	13:50	The Jewish Hearing
6	The New Claim	13:12	The Skeptic's Reply: Wishful Thinking

PROGRAM 1:

GETTING THE KINGDOM STARTED

If you could choose a place and time to be born, this wouldn't be it. The Middle East was at the major turning-point of history, with politics of oppression and torture, revolution, murder, and sudden death.

Or, perhaps worse, slow, lingering deaths. The deaths which said, louder than any imperial proclamation: we rule this country. You happen to live here, but you will pay us homage, give us taxes. We will give you strong government. We will give you peace—on our terms. Whether you like it or not.

Most people didn't like it. Some of them—lots of them—ended up paying the usual price of a horrible death. It was at this time and place that a boy was born whose name everybody knows, but whose life and life-work are often misunderstood. Jesus of Nazareth.

I've spent quite a bit of the last twenty years studying Jesus within his historical context. It's been enormously challenging for me at every level, both intellectually and personally. I've had to abandon several ideas that I thought were fixed forever. And I've seen and learned things that I never expected, things which have opened my eyes to dimensions of history and faith I had never imagined.

We are going to illustrate the story of Jesus with a wide range of images and art works. None of them, of course, portray Jesus as he actually was. The Gospels tell us nothing of what he looked like. But they bear eloquent testimony to the power that his life story has exercised ever since. They encourage us in our quest to find out more of who he was and what he did.

Waiting for God

The Jews of Jesus' day lived on hope. They often had nothing else to live on. They remembered very well that five hundred years previously they had been exiled in Babylon. Then they had come back. That was remarkable enough, but returning geographically to their own land didn't mean that everything was suddenly as it should be. They were, as one of them said, slaves in their own land. The Persians ruled them. The Greeks ruled them. Then the Syrians ruled them. Nobody likes being ruled by foreigners,

but for the Jews it was particularly galling. They believed their God was the one true God of all the earth. So why did He let these stupid and evil pagans trample all over them?

They waited and hoped and prayed and studied their sacred books. But some of them decided to act. Two hundred years before Jesus of Nazareth did it, a bold leader called Judas Maccabaeus¹ came into Jerusalem with palm branches waving, and cleansed the Temple. In order to do this, he had to win a great military victory. The Jews celebrated wildly. Their God had acted at last.

It was a mixed blessing. Ever afterwards, they believed it would happen again. Judas Maccabaeus, by defeating the enemy and cleansing the Temple, started a royal dynasty that would last for a hundred years. But on the political horizon, a new star was rising. Or, as they would put it, a new monster, a new beast, was coming up out of the sea. This beast would make Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Syria look tame by comparison. This beast was Rome. The Roman eagle spread its wings over the whole Middle East and far beyond, putting down resistance with simple and crude efficiency. They installed puppet kings like Herod the Great, who then copied the sheer brutality of his political masters.

Anyone and everyone growing up in Palestine would know what a cross was and would know who ended up on one and why.

Resist and Conquer

Resistance,² though, wasn't just a political act. For the Jews, it was deeply religious. Their God was the God of all the earth. And He had called them to be His special people forever. They couldn't compromise with the pagans. They studied their scriptures eagerly. They searched them for clues about how and when the great liberation would appear. They combed them to discover how they should obey their God more, and more carefully, in the meantime.

Several Jews of Jesus' day came up with answers to these two questions. Their reading of scripture told them that the great story of Israel was reaching its fateful climax. The night would reach its darkest point, and then the day would dawn. God would act to liberate His people from the monsters, to show that they really were His people after all. Their part was to act in obedience to God, to defeat the pagans by whatever means were necessary. Fierce holiness and fierce resistance went hand in hand. From this powerful ideology there emerged one movement after another, each supposing that the great moment was about to dawn.

¹ **JUDAS MACCABAEUS:** (Dates of Jewish independence: 167-63 B.C.) When the Seleucids demanded that Jews offer sacrifices to Zeus, conflict broke out around Jerusalem (around 166 B.C.). The third son of Mattathias (an aged priest), Judas (nicknamed Maccabeus, "the hammerer") led the revolt. A successful soldier, the Hasidim made up his army. These men were devoutly committed to religious freedom, obedience to the law, and the worship of God. Judas took control of Jerusalem within three years. He cleansed the Temple and rededicated it. This event is still commemorated by the Jewish feast of Hannukah. He was killed in 160 B.C. at Elasa, while fighting a Seleucid army. Jewish independence ended when, in 63 B.C., the Romans took control over Palestine. Judas Maccabaeus and his companions accomplished the unthinkable when they organized a guerrilla revolt that drove out the tyrant. The Maccabean revolt became classic and formative in the same way as the exodus and the other great events of Israel's history. It powerfully reinforced the basic Jewish worldview: when the tyrants rage, the one who dwells in heaven will laugh them to scorn. YHWH had vindicated his name, his place, his land, his law—and his people.

² **JEWISH RESISTANCE:** In Jesus' day, Israel was in deep trouble. The people were living under the rule of the pagan Romans, with heavily compromised local politicians, and sliding deeper and deeper into debt. Not surprisingly, a number of groups arose, usually led by a would-be prophet or king. Usually such prophets and messiahs didn't live very long. We know of ten or a dozen other movements that arose in Palestine within about a hundred years either side of Jesus. There seem to have been lots of other young Jews who were prepared to risk all at the head of a little revolutionary group, in the hope that their God would act through them and bring in His kingdom. In the time of Jesus, the hills above the Sea of Galilee used to be the hang-out for holy revolutionaries, for outlaws ready to defeat the pagan Romans and to bring in the kingdom of God—by force if necessary. Nearby is the so-called "Mount of Beatitudes," the traditional site where Jesus preached his most famous sermon. When Jesus first gave what we now call the Sermon on the Mount, he was staging something that would look to us much more like a political rally. He was like someone drumming up support for a new movement, a new great cause.

³ **ABRAHAM:** The son of Terah (a descendant of Noah's son, Shem), Abraham (meaning "father of a multitude") was the first Hebrew patriarch. Abraham was 100 years old when his promised son, Isaac ("laughter"), was born to him and to his wife, Sarah. Abraham has become known as the prime example of faith. God rewarded Abraham's faithfulness. He became known as "God's friend forever" ["O our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend" (2 Chron. 20:7 NIV)]. Hebrews 11 reads: "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.... By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death" (11:8-12, 17-19 NIV).

⁴ **THE EXODUS AND MOSES:** To this day, Jews all around the world tell the story year by year of how their God rescued them out of slavery in Egypt—the great escape known as the Exodus. He brought them through the Red Sea. They spent forty years wandering in the wilderness until they arrived at the edge of the land God had promised them as home. Moses brought them that far, but then he died—up in the hills overlooking the valley. Joshua took over.

Moses: His name means "drawn out of the water." To limit population growth of the Israelites, Pharaoh ordered that newborn Hebrew boys be thrown to their deaths in the Nile (see Exodus 1:22). Moses' mother made a bulrush basket, and placed child and basket in the river. Pharaoh's daughter found him and adopted the baby as her own child. Moses grew up in luxury in Pharaoh's household. But Moses became concerned with the oppression of his people. When Moses saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, he killed the Egyptian and then fled to the land of Midian. There he married a Midianite's daughter and became a shepherd. Moses' turning point came when he confronted a burning bush. God spoke to him through the fire, and presented him with a special commission. After much debate with and opposition from Pharaoh, Moses led his people from Egypt to Mount Sinai, an exodus that lasted 40 years. Moses died (see Deuteronomy 34), never reaching the "promised land" (see Numbers 20).

But the Maccabean miracle never happened again. The new movements all ended up the same way. They fizzled out, or were violently suppressed.

Keeping Hope Alive

They kept the flames of revolution fanned by telling the old stories. God called Abraham³ to father a great nation. He saved His people from Egypt in the Exodus.⁴ He rescued them from the pagans. They must resist through thick and thin, and their God will vindicate them. Daniel stands firm in his resolve, and he is saved from the den of lions.

That picture became a model for the great dreams in which the sovereign God would defeat the monsters and vindicate Israel, like a human being rescued from wild animals. Language like this—about "beasts" and the "son of man"—was coded revolutionary talk to keep hope alive.

This hope, then, has its roots way back in scripture. Scripture led them to speak of a coming kingdom. So, the revolutionaries believed that there should be "no king but God." One day Israel's God would be king over the whole world, liberating His people and defeating evil once and for all. One day a messenger would appear on the mountains around Jerusalem, calling to the holy city that her God was indeed king:

*How lovely on the mountains
are the feet of the one who announces peace,
who brings good news,
Who announced salvation,
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."
Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices
and shout together for joy,
For eye to eye they see YHWH returning to Zion.
Break forth into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem;
For YHWH has comforted His people,
He has redeemed Jerusalem.
YHWH has bared His holy arm
in the sight of all the nations,
And all the ends of the earth
shall see the salvation of our God. (Isaiah 52:7-10)*

Texts like this resonated down through history, becoming fresh to each generation. Israel's continuing state of exile was caused by her own sin, but YHWH would act to forgive her sins and to set her free from the pagans at last. He would come Himself, and dwell with His people as He had always promised. This was the story in which Jesus' contemporaries were living.

Powerful Symbols

At the center stood the Temple. Solomon⁵ had built it a thousand years before. The returning exiles had rebuilt it after the Babylonian exile. Judas Maccabaeus had cleansed it after the Syrian invasion. Now the Romans were guarding it, wary of it as a flash-point for revolt. King Herod, desperate to legitimate his position as king of the Jews, was rebuilding it and beautifying it. The Jews believed God would rebuild it properly when He redeemed His people.

The Law, the Torah,⁶ had been given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai to be the covenant charter, the document binding Himself to Israel for all time. Torah would be kept perfectly in the coming age, so loyal Jews struggled to keep it as perfectly as they could in the meantime. For those on the borders, in places like Galilee, keeping Torah marked you out from your pagan neighbors, particularly the sabbath laws and the food laws.⁷ What you ate, how you cooked it, and whom you ate it with all said: we are the true people of God.

The Holy Land had been promised by YHWH to Abraham. It had been trampled on, ravaged, parcelled out, and carved up by one empire after another. But it was still God's holy land, and the Jews still cherished the hope that one day it would be free of pagans for good.

In the meantime, they clung with fierce loyalty to their family identity. They were the family of Abraham, the family to whom the one true God had promised to be loyal forever. Not only would they not marry outside the family, but most loyal Jews wouldn't even eat with pagans. Together all these symbols said: we are the people of God. We are the people the living God will vindicate when He acts.

The Essene Community and the Dead Sea Scrolls

One of the best known movements within the Judaism of Jesus' day was the Essenes, who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls⁸ found in the caves at Qumran. After fifty years of scholarly work, all the Scrolls are in the public domain. It's slowly becoming possible to get a clear picture of the group who wrote them.

They seem to have begun as a counter-Temple movement. They were bitterly opposed (as were the Pharisees⁹) to the new regime which sprang up after the Maccabean revolt. The Essenes regarded themselves as the true priesthood, over against the corrupt regime who were in charge in the Temple. They saw themselves as the true Israel. All other Jews, they reckoned, were compromisers. They

⁵ SOLOMON: "The temple I am going to build will be great," Solomon said, "because our God is greater than all other gods. But who is able to build a temple for him, since the heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain him? Who then am I to build a temple for him, except as a place to burn sacrifices before him?" (2 Chron. 2:5 NIV, cf. 1 Kings 6). Solomon, the temple-builder, is an obvious messianic model. (Jesus compares himself to Solomon in Matthew 12:42: "The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here" NIV.) For Jesus to compare himself with Solomon was to stake a definite messianic claim. To claim that Jesus is greater than he is to claim that he is the true Messiah; that he will build the eschatological Temple; that through him the Davidic kingdom will be restored. It also suggests that this Messiah will be the one to whom the nations will come and bow in obedience: through his kingdom the prophecies of messianic worldwide restoration will be fulfilled.

⁶ TORAH: Torah, or "law," eventually became a title for the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). The Torah was given to Moses ("The Lord said to Moses, 'Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction'" (Exodus 24:12 NIV). God had given Israel his Torah, so that by keeping it she may be his people, may be rescued from her pagan enemies, and confirmed as ruler in her own land.

⁷ SABBATH LAWS: The word sabbath means "to cease" or "desist." On the Sabbath, all work should stop. Regulations concerning the sabbath are a main feature of the Mosaic laws. The sabbath belonged to God. On six days the Israelites should work, but on the seventh, they must rest, as well as all slaves, foreigners, and beasts. The day became a time for worship (see Lev. 23:1-3). It was also a token of their covenant with God (see Ex. 31:12-17; Ezek. 20:12-20). Thirty-nine tasks were banned, such as tying or untying a knot. The penalty for desecration of the Sabbath was death (see Ex. 35:1-3).

FOOD LAWS: Whether the meals was formal or informal, food laws had to be observed. Only animals which chewed the cud and had divided hoofs, fish which had fins and scales, and birds which did not eat carrion could be eaten (see Lev. 11:1-22). Soups should not be made with a mixture of vegetables (see Deut. 9:9). Meat and milk dishes were not to be taken together (see Ex. 23:19).

⁸ DEAD SEA SCROLLS: Just a few miles from the Jordan is the famous settlement at Qumran, where a religious group called Essenes lived. (Note: Qumran is located eight miles south of Jericho and just under a mile west of the northwestern edge of the Dead Sea.) They were waiting for Israel's God to act, to defeat the Romans, to punish the people they saw as renegade Jews, and

Continued on next page

to establish his kingdom of justice and peace. Then, when the Romans closed in on them, they hid their precious writings in the caves nearby. We call these writings the Dead Sea Scrolls. Hailed in 1948 as the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times, the Scrolls shed fascinating light on the part that one first-century sect believed it would play in establishing God's kingdom on earth. The Dead Sea Scrolls don't undermine Christianity. They don't even mention it. The Scrolls reveal a community that is a sort of second cousin to Christianity. The Scrolls do, however, shed a flood of light on early Christianity from one particular angle. They show how, within the turbulent world of first-century Judaism, a group that believed God was acting in history to liberate His people, and was doing so in and through their community, might retell the story of God and His people so as to include themselves within it.

⁹ **PHARISEES:** Paul was a Pharisee before he became a Christian (Phil. 3:5). Their name means "the separated ones." They developed the oral tradition, and saw the way to God through obedience to the law. Monotheistic, they accepted all the Old Testament as authoritative. They believed in angels and demons, as well as life after physical death and a bodily resurrection. It is believed that they were the spiritual descendants of the Hasidim, the loyal fighters for religious freedom in Judas Maccabaeus' time.

¹⁰ **WHAT IS MEANT BY "MESSIAH":** Messiah means "anointed one" (in Hebrew) corresponding to "Christos" (in Greek). Throughout Hebrew history, the children of Israel hoped the "anointed of God" would come, a warrior who would expel the Romans from Israel and establish a world-reigning Jewish kingdom. Jesus came, however, not as a victorious warrior king, but as a suffering servant. But, in the coming of Jesus the "Christos" or the "Christ," the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled. It was at Caesarea Philippi, near the slopes of Mount Hermon, that Jesus received the recognition from his disciples that he was the Christ, the Messiah, marking a turning-point that was to lead to his return to Jerusalem, and to death at the hands of the Romans. It was Peter who recognized Jesus as the Christ when: "Jesus and his disciples went into the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, 'Who do people say I am?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'You are the Christ.' Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him" (Mark 8:27-30 NIV).

¹¹ **HEROD ANTIPAS** (son of **HEROD THE GREAT**): "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee...the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins...." (Luke 3:1-3 NIV)

observed strict purity regulations. They cherished dreams of a coming Messiah,¹⁰ who would lead them in a holy war, almost a religious ritual, against the pagans.

And they studied the scriptures and wrote the earliest commentaries we possess on some of their favorite texts. They believed that God had secretly begun His new covenant, His new Israel, His new world, with them. They believed that they were the advance guard of the real return from exile. So they went through the prophecies line by line, showing how they were coming true in the life of their own community. And they believed, of course, that God would soon bring the story to its great climax, setting them free to build the new Temple, to keep Torah perfectly, and to live as the true Israel forever.

Jesus of Nazareth wasn't an Essene. His movement had different origins. But he was, as it were, a sort of second cousin to them theologically. He too believed that the scriptures were being fulfilled in his own work. He too believed that the real return from exile was secretly beginning to happen. To see what he meant by that we have to look at another figure who, like the Essenes, lived down by the river Jordan: Jesus' cousin John.

The Wild Prophet

It wasn't just the Romans that devout Jews of Jesus' day objected to. Their immediate ruler, in Galilee at least, was Herod Antipas.¹¹ He was one of the sons of Herod the Great, and he managed to survive his father and hang on as ruler of parts of Palestine (including Galilee and some of the land to the east of the Jordan). His brother Archelaus had briefly been the ruler of Judaea, but the Romans had kicked him out and put in their own governor. Herod Antipas hung on.

Partly in order to ingratiate himself with his pagan bosses, he built a new city, Tiberias,¹² in honor of the new emperor. But Herod was no more popular with his subjects than his father had been. They were driven off the land to pay his taxes. They hated his compromises with paganism. When the kingdom came, and there would be "no king but God," it wouldn't only be Caesar they'd be getting rid of. It would be Herod as well.

So when a prophet appeared in part of Herod's territory, announcing that now at last God was preparing to become king, we can imagine Herod's reaction. Worse, this prophet was symbolically re-enacting the Exodus from Egypt, by splashing people in the Jordan and telling them that God was forgiving their sins. The chief priests wouldn't like that,

either. John was undercutting their power base, too. He was offering, down there in the Jordan wilderness, what you would normally get by going to the Temple. John's movement was another counter-Temple movement.

In particular, John¹³ was doing things which said that now at last the great story of Israel was coming to its climax. God was about to return and revisit His people, this time for good. The wilderness, particularly the Jordan wilderness, had always been for them the place where God and Israel would get it together once more:

*A voice crying out in the wilderness,
prepare the way of YHWH;
Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
And every mountain and hill made low;
And the glory of YHWH shall be revealed,
And all flesh shall see it together;
for the mouth of YHWH has spoken. (Isaiah 40:3-5)*

What John was doing would make people think of passages like that. What he said confirmed that this was indeed what he meant. He spoke of the "coming one," the one who would plunge His people not in the water, but in the fire. The one who would renew the covenant by pouring out His own Spirit on His people. It wasn't surprising that some people thought John might be the Messiah.

It wasn't surprising, either, that John was fiercely critical of Herod Antipas. He chose to seize on one of Herod's many compromises with pagan lifestyle: marrying his brother's ex-wife. That wasn't the only thing Herod objected to, but it was the flash-point which got John put in prison. But not before John had found his slightly younger cousin coming to join in his kingdom movement. This is where the young adult, Jesus of Nazareth, walks into the pages of first century history.

Enter Jesus

But how do we know about Jesus? For two centuries now, scholars in Europe and North America have argued about whether we really know who Jesus was, or whether it was all just made up by the early church. This is a huge subject, but it's important to stress that the sources we have for Jesus are as good and better than the sources we have for any other figure of his day, whether Julius Caesar, or the emperor Nero, or anybody else.

Oh, say some people, the gospels are biased, because they're written by Christians. Well, of course. But all history

¹² **TIBERIAS:** Tiberius Caesar was 54 years old when he took the throne. He ruled from A.D. 14-37, following Augustus as Roman emperor. It was during the reign of Tiberias that Jesus began his ministry, and was crucified. Tiberius died in A.D. 37, at 79 years of age.

¹³ **JOHN THE BAPTIST:** John was plunging people into the Jordan. The Greek word for "plunge" or "dip," or "splash" or even "flood" or "drown" is "baptizo," so they called John's plunging "baptism," and they called John himself "John the Plunger," or, with the Greek word, "John the Baptizer." In baptizing people, John was symbolically re-enacting what happened when the children of Israel came through the River Jordan and into the promised land. This was an Exodus-symbol. After Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan to the Promised Land, the Jordan River became a symbol of salvation and hope for the Jewish people. John the Baptist called the people here to prepare for the coming of Jesus—"the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). Baptism was all about salvation, rescue, liberty, the new start that the people had longed for. Israel would come home at last. God would come home too. Evil would be defeated, and the true God would become the king of all the earth. People were flocking here from all over to be plunged into the river as a sign that they wanted to be part of the renewed people of God, the people who would be rescued from exile at last.

is biased, just like all newspapers, and indeed television programs, are biased. When Julius Caesar wrote his own memoirs, he wasn't exactly an impartial observer. When the Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius wrote about the Roman empire, they weren't unbiased. They hated the emperors like poison. Historians have to read the texts and assess them for what they really tell us.

But, people say, the gospels are theological documents. Yes, but this doesn't mean they don't tell us about history. In the first century in Palestine, you couldn't get a razor blade between God and politics, between theology and history. The gospel writers believed that God had acted within history. They told the story of what had actually happened because they believed that was where God was at work. The historian can't write them off. What counts in doing history is the overall sense that emerges when you put the whole jigsaw puzzle together. On that criterion the story the gospels tell comes out very well.

The Revolutionary Announcement

The gospels say that Jesus joined in with his cousin's movement. But when John was arrested, Jesus saw that as the signal to branch out on his own. Jesus moved to the fishing village of Capernaum, at the north end of the sea of Galilee. He began to go about, announcing that now at last Israel's story was complete. Now at last Israel's God was becoming king.

Jesus, like John, was seen as a prophet.¹⁴ He seems to have deliberately adopted this style: he reminded people of the great old prophets, like Elijah or Jeremiah, and of his cousin, John, himself. But, unlike John, Jesus went about from place to place. He sensibly kept on the move. As far as we can tell, he never went into the big cities in Galilee. He went from village to village, telling people that God was now becoming king.

What would people have heard, as he did this? In view of all the other kingdom movements that the Jews knew of, many people would naturally assume that Jesus was leading, or getting ready for, some kind of revolution. He wasn't actually telling them to march on Herod's palace, or on Jerusalem, but he kept telling cryptic, coded stories about seeds growing secretly, about a coming harvest in which, at a given signal, God would put in His sickle and reap the crop. Many people reckoned they could put two and two together and make five. This was what they wanted to hear. This was a message that would make Herod Antipas shiver

¹⁴**PROPHET:** "Nabi" or "prophet" means "one who is called to speak." A prophet is one who declares a word from God through the Holy Spirit's prompting. Some Old Testament prophets include: Moses, Deborah (a prophetess or female prophet), Samuel, Gad, Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Obadiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The prophets spoke for God throughout Israel's history. Jesus called himself a prophet: "In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem" (Luke 13:33 NIV).

in his shoes, even more than he had over John. It might make the Romans think it was time for a few more crucifixions.

But the strange stories Jesus told¹⁵ and the remarkable things he did didn't actually point towards the standard sort of kingdom revolution that so many of his contemporaries were expecting. His stories seemed to have a twist in the tail. Yes, the kingdom was coming. But it wasn't like what people were hoping for. Yes, God was now going to take His power and reign. But the results would be quite different from what the ordinary revolutionaries and ordinary people had supposed.

Wherever Jesus went, large crowds followed him for one reason in particular: he healed people with all kinds of diseases. Skeptical scholars used to doubt this. Now, almost all historians, except the most closed-minded skeptics, accept that Jesus really did have the ability (however we want to describe it) to give people new health and new life. Jesus seemed to be indicating that in the revolution that he was announcing, there wouldn't just be a political upheaval, resulting in the underdogs—the Jews—coming out on top. There would be a personal upheaval for everyone who got involved. God was doing new, strange, disturbing things at every level.

All this fed into the particular way Jesus was telling the kingdom story. He wasn't just talking about Israel beating up her enemies and being free in her own land forever. In fact, when he preached his first sermon in his home town of Nazareth, he pointed out that, in some of the old prophetic stories, when people needed healing in Israel, the only person who actually got healed was the commander of the enemy army, the pagans who were battling with Israel. That went down like a lead balloon. People wanted to hear that the kingdom was coming. But they weren't at all sure they approved of Jesus' particular kingdom vision. The kingdom, he said, was breaking in, and the violent were trying to muscle in on the act. If we are to understand what Jesus was about, we have to see the two halves of what he was saying quite clearly. The kingdom his contemporaries were longing for was indeed arriving. But it didn't look anything like what they wanted.

¹⁵**JESUS' STORIES:** Stories are not just kids' stuff, pretty embroidery around the edges of serious abstract thought. Stories are dynamic and explosive. They do things; they change things; they make things. Jesus' stories, people say, were just "earthly stories with heavenly meaning." But that's rubbish! Stories are far more powerful than that. Stories create worlds. Tell the story differently, and you change the world. And that's what Jesus aimed to do. People in Jesus' world knew that stories meant business; that stories were a way of getting to grips with reality. Jesus told all sorts of stories. Each one was like a stick of dynamite, ready to explode at any moment. He went to and fro, planting these explosive charges in people's hearts and minds. The kingdom of God, God's new rule, was going to change everything.

Questions for Review

1. Describe the situation in the Middle East at the time of Jesus' birth.
2. "The Jews of Jesus' day lived on hope." What does this statement mean?
3. Who was Judas Maccabaeus? What did he do? What happened to the Maccabean movement?
4. What were some of the "powerful symbols" that kept hope alive for the children of Israel?
5. Why did loyal Jews not eat with pagans? Why did they not marry outside the family? Why did they cling "with fierce loyalty" to their family identity?
6. Who were the Essenes? What did they believe? What are the Dead Sea Scrolls?
7. Who was Jesus' cousin, John?
8. What made people think that John the Baptist might be the Messiah?
9. How was John critical of Herod Antipas? How did his criticism eventually cost him his life?
10. Discuss the following: "In the first century in Palestine, you couldn't get a razor blade between God and politics, between theology and history." What does this mean?
11. How did Jesus begin his ministry? Do you see his ministry as a "revolutionary announcement"?
12. How did the people first see Jesus: As the Messiah? As a revolutionary? As the coming King? As a prophet? Why?
13. Why did large crowds follow Jesus?

For Deeper Examination and Study

The Roman Empire before, during, and after the time of Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection:

THE LAND OF ISRAEL

The land of Israel is a small country. You can walk its length, north to south, in a few days, and from its central mountains you can see its lateral boundaries, the sea to the west and the river to the east. But it has had an importance out of all proportion to its size. Empires have fought over it. Every forty-four years out of the last four thousand, on average, an army has marched through it, whether to conquer it, to rescue it from someone else, to use it as a neutral battleground on which to fight a different enemy, or to take advantage of it as the natural route for getting somewhere else to fight there instead. There are many places which, once beautiful, are now battered and mangled with the legacies of war. And yet it has remained a beautiful land, still producing grapes and figs, milk and honey. (If the children of Israel had heeded the Deuteronomic warnings, there would have been more milk and honey, and less misery and injustice, when they eventually crossed the Jordan.)

OCCUPIED BY ROMANS

Jerusalem, conquered and made the capital of Israel by King David around 1000 B.C., had been occupied by the Romans for half a century by the time Jesus was born. The empire proper began with Augustus at the battle of Actium in 31 B.C., and ended with the abdication of the last of the Caesars in 476 A.D. The Roman Empire included most of Europe, the Middle East, and the northern coastal area of Africa. By A.D. 117, it included about 2,500,000 square miles. In the time of Christ, the population of the Roman Empire was 85 million. But by the time Paul had an audience with procurator Felix, the Roman Empire had grown to 120 million. While people were allowed to speak their native tongue, all official acts were carried out in Latin. Latin was the official language, Hebrew was the religious language of the Jews, and Greek served as the popular language of the common people. (This is why the inscription put on Jesus' cross was in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.)

ROMAN PEACE

The *pax Romana* or "Roman peace" began with the reign of Augustus and lasted 200-300 years. During this time of relative stability in the Roman Empire, people prospered and travel was

For Deeper Examination and Study

unhindered. The standard of living rose and commerce flourished. This period of peace greatly aided the Apostle Paul and the expansion of Christianity, for Paul could travel freely throughout the Mediterranean world, and he could expect the protection of the Roman government.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN THE EARLY ROMAN EMPIRE

In the early Roman Empire, gods such as Janus, Jupiter, Juno, Mars, and Vesta symbolized the powers of nature. Many of the gods were agricultural deities. Religion was a contract, "I give that you may give." Romans worked hard to preserve "the peace of the gods" through sacrifices and other religious ceremonies. There were thousands of gods. As Roman power expanded, the influence of Greek religion became strong. The Romans began to worship Greek gods like Apollo. Greek myths surrounded these gods. Around 20 B.C., the time of Augustus, people grew tired of the "old religion," and adopted the ideas of Greek philosophers, especially the Stoics and the Epicureans. Augustus and later emperors tried to revive the old religion and even declared themselves to be gods. People turned to Oriental religions, such as the worship of Cybele, Isis, Mithras, and Serapis. Finally, because of the dissatisfaction people experienced with the vast array of religions and gods, Christianity began to gain converts. But Christians endured severe persecution under Nero and Diocletian. Constantine, however, in A.D. 313, gave Christians the freedom to worship Jesus Christ. Under Theodosius I (about A.D. 380), Christianity became the state religion.

JEWS IN PALESTINE DURING THE ROMAN PERIOD

The majority of Jews in Palestine during the Roman period kept more or less to their biblical laws, prayed to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and regulated their lives so as to emphasize the regular feasts and fasts of the calendar. They prayed, they fasted, they went to synagogue, they travelled to Jerusalem for the regular feasts. They did not eat pork, they kept the sabbath, they circumcised their male children. (They paid sufficient attention to the Pharisees as respected.)

For Deeper Examination and Study

ISRAEL'S WORLDVIEW

Even under control of the Romans, Israel had a rich but basically simple worldview:

1. Who are we?

We are Israel, the chosen people of the Creator God.

2. Where are we?

We are in the holy Land, focused on the Temple; but, paradoxically, we are still in exile.

3. What is wrong?

We have the wrong rulers: pagans on the one hand, compromised Jews on the other, or half-way between, Herod and his family. We are all involved in a less-than-ideal situation.

4. What is the solution?

Our God must act again to give us the true sort of rule, that is, his own kingship exercised through properly appointed officials; and in the meantime, Israel must be faithful to this covenant charter.

Questions for Deeper Discussion

1. Discuss, in detail, the power Rome had over the Middle East in this period. How did the Roman government structure itself? How had Rome conquered the land they ruled? How long would the Roman Empire last?
2. Describe the relationship between the children of Israel and the Roman authorities.
3. Study and discuss the children of Israel's exile in Babylon. How did this exile end and why?
4. List the reasons why the Jewish people thought Judas Maccabaeus might be the long-awaited Messiah.
5. Choose one of the following to study and discuss:
 - the Temple
 - the Torah
 - the Holy Land
6. How did Herod Antipas acquire his rulership of Galilee? What was Herod's reaction to John the Baptist's prophecy? What is meant by the term "counter-Temple movement"?
7. Discuss the writings of Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius.
8. Describe the physical land of Israel.
9. What is meant by "pax Romana"? How long did it last? How did it help the spread of Christianity?
10. Define religious pluralism in the early Roman Empire.
11. What was Israel's worldview?

PROGRAM 2: STARTLING SURPRISES

[Dramatization of Healing of the Blind Man (John 9:6-9)]

One of the scraps of text found among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran sheds a sudden sharp light on what Jesus was up to as he went to and fro announcing the kingdom.

It lists classes of people who are absolutely prohibited from holding office in the community. Just listen to this:

Neither the blind nor the lame

Nor the deaf nor the dumb

Nor the lepers,¹ nor those whose flesh is blemished

Shall be admitted to the council of the community.

This was in accordance with an old Jewish belief, that only the pure, the physically whole, could be a real part of the community. The lepers were the obvious example: they had to be shut away, outside the village. But anyone whose illness made them ritually impure was in the same boat—particularly women suffering from something like a hemorrhage.

Once you realize that, you read the stories of Jesus healing people in a whole new light. He wasn't just going around being a kind of faith-healer, giving people a new physical start to their lives. His healings were also symbolic. They were the actions which formed the focus of his kingdom announcement. They were concrete deeds which said, louder than any words could have done, this is where the kingdom of God is coming. And this is what it looks like. This is how the people of Israel are being reconstituted.

For those who had ears to hear, what Jesus was doing awoke echoes of old prophecies, of what would happen when God restored the fortunes of his people.

Party Time

Other things that Jesus regularly did wherever he went also surprised, and sometimes shocked, his contemporaries. He was always at parties, and often with all the wrong people. Folk had muttered about John the Baptist, that he was a bit peculiar because he wouldn't join in when people were celebrating. He was an austere man, living on a restricted diet, warning people of judgment to come. But Jesus seems to have been the sort of person you always want at the cen-

¹ **LEPERS:** Leprosy was a dreaded skin disorder. Its symptoms ranged from white patches on the skin to running sores to the loss of fingers and toes. (The word "leprosy" was also used to describe a number of different skin eruptions.) The priests determined if these skin eruptions posed a threat to others. They were given the authority to isolate people with suspected skin diseases from the community. The Hebrews considered lepers ceremonially unclean and unfit to worship God. (Leviticus 15:31 NIV states: "You must keep the Israelites separate from things that make them unclean, so they will not die in their uncleanness for defiling my dwelling place, which is among them"). Anyone coming in contact with a leper was also considered unclean. Lepers were isolated from the community and regarded as outcasts of society. Jesus, on the other hand, touched lepers, healed them, and even made a leper the hero in his parable about the rich man and Lazarus (see Luke 16:19-31).

² JEWISH WEDDINGS AND MARRIAGE:

In Jesus' time, Jewish weddings were exciting events. Scripture records that Jesus performed his first miracle at a wedding (see John 2:1-11). In the New Testament, marriage was founded on a love-commitment, and women were to be loved and nurtured, not to be considered property by men (see Eph. 5:25). Jesus intended marriage to be a lifelong commitment (see Mark 10:5-9; Matthew 19:4-9). The Mosaic law allowed a man to divorce his wife but required a bill of divorce for her: "If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house,..." (Deut. 24:1 NIV).

³ THE PRODIGAL SON: "...There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate" (Luke 15:11-24 NIV).

ter of a party. He was celebrating. He spoke of his work in terms of a wedding banquet.² Again, for those with ears to hear, this would make you think of some of the old promises: God would throw a great party for His people, a time for laughter and dancing and celebration.

But Jesus was notorious not just for going to parties, but for being seen there in questionable company.

Time to Celebrate!

The trouble was, Jesus wasn't just a private individual, eating with his friends. He was acting as a prophet announcing God's kingdom. Someone like that should have been more careful not to undermine the hope of Israel by eating with the impure, the down-and-outs, the sinners. Jesus threw all that to the winds.

When challenged, he told stories to explain what he was doing. Some of his greatest stories aren't abstract teaching, but small dramas which explain what he saw was going on.

The best known of these stories of explanation is the one we call the "Prodigal Son."³ Actually, though, the "Prodigal Father" would be a better title. In that culture, sons don't ask fathers for cash down ahead of the time. It is, in effect, putting a curse on the father. It's saying, "I wish you were dead." But in this story, the father says "Okay, be my guest. Have your share now." And then, when the son has gone off and squandered it all, disgracing the family name beyond repair, he comes home again in total shame. Instead of the frosty reception you would expect in that culture, the father throws his dignity to the winds and runs down the road to embrace and greet him. It's unthinkable. It's scandalous.

Yes, Jesus is saying, this is just like the scandal you're accusing me of, of celebrating the kingdom with all the wrong people. Jesus tells this story to explain the party, the celebration with the sinners.

But once again, those with ears to hear could work out what was going on. Here is a young no-good son who goes off into a pagan country and ends up feeding pigs. Then he's welcomed back, against all the odds. The story is all about exile and restoration. It's the story above all that Jesus' fellow Jews were wanting to hear. It was the story of the kingdom of God. But it didn't look like they had thought it would.

The Time Is Now

So Jesus was doing things and saying things which

plugged right in to what his contemporaries were waiting for—but in a way which constantly stood their expectations on their heads. When he told stories, which we call “parables,” he was regularly telling the story of Israel, in coded language, in such a way as to say: Your story is reaching its climax, here and now, through what I’m doing. This is what the kingdom looks like.

Take a story like the parable of the sower.⁴ The prophets had spoken about Israel’s God acting within history to “sow” Israel again in her own land. Isaiah had used the image of God sowing His word⁵ as a sign that the exile was over, that He was restoring Israel at last. Jesus picks up this prophetic imagery, and tells a story of a farmer sowing seed in his field. But not all the seed does what he wants. Quite a lot of it seems to go to waste. There is a wonderful great harvest, but there is also loss, barrenness, judgment, and failure. The kingdom is coming, but its coming is strange. Israel isn’t simply going to be affirmed as she stands.

You Are Invited

As Jesus went about telling people that the kingdom was coming, he regularly summoned them to do something about it. The words he used are words we are used to, but they don’t mean quite what we normally suppose. He told people to “repent and believe.” What would that say to a Jew of Jesus’ day?

In our culture, telling someone to repent and believe would mean telling them to give up their private sins and “get religion.” In Jesus’ culture, though, those words had a wider, fuller, more down-to-earth meaning.

About thirty years after Jesus’ day, a young army commander was sent to Galilee from Jerusalem to confront the rebels, the brigands who were trying to launch a homemade revolution against Rome. This young general was the historian Josephus,⁶ who writes about the incident in his autobiography. Josephus tells us that he confronted the brigand leader and told him in no uncertain terms to give up his crazy agendas and to trust him, Josephus, for his instead. But the words he uses are, in Greek, *metanoesein kai pistos emoi genesesthai*, which translate as “repent and believe in me.” That’s what those words meant in first-century Palestine. Give up your agendas, and trust me for mine. Now I’m quite sure that Jesus of Nazareth meant a good deal more than Josephus meant when he said that. But I don’t think he meant any less. He was urging his contemporaries to give up their agendas and trust him for his.

⁴ **PARABLE OF THE SOWER:** “A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown... This is the meaning of the parable. The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop” (Luke 8:5-8, 11-15 NIV).

⁵ **ISAIAH 55:** “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord’s renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed” (Is. 55 NIV).

⁶ **JOSEPHUS:** Flavius Josephus was an early historian of Jewish life and our most important non-Christian source for the history of the Jews in the Roman period. Reflecting the situation in Palestine, before the two great rebellions of A.D. 66-70 and 132-5, Josephus provides important information in his two great works *The Jewish War* (seven books, which include a prehistory dating back to the second century B.C.) and *The Antiquities of the Jews* (written in Rome, and paraphrasing the Septuagint). His shorter autobiographical *Life*, and defense of Judaism *Against Apion* (focuses upon the six months he was commander of Jewish forces in Galilee), also constitute valuable material. Although the actual date is not known, Josephus probably died after A.D. 100.

The Shocking Welcome

So, as we saw, Jesus ended up celebrating the kingdom with all the wrong people, welcoming them into companionship, fellowship, with himself. And, because he was claiming to be bringing about the real return from exile, we shouldn't be surprised when he claims to be offering forgiveness of sins. That, after all, was what the return from exile was all about—the time when God would deal with Israel's sins once and for all, and so liberate her from the plight she had got herself into. By welcoming sinners into fellowship, he was constantly implying that they could be forgiven, just by being with him and sharing his table, and his agenda. Sometimes he actually said it in so many words: "Your sins are forgiven."

[Dramatization of Healing of the Paralytic]

This, of course, was just as shocking as the welcome itself. Only God forgives sins. More to the point, sins would normally be declared forgiven in and through the whole Temple system. What Jesus did, as much as what he said, implied that he, like the Essenes and John the Baptist, was launching some kind of counter-Temple movement. What you'd normally get by going to the Temple, you could have right here on the street by being with Jesus.

The New Challenge

Jesus was, therefore, challenging his contemporaries to live as the returned-from-exile people, the people whose hearts were renewed by the word and work of the living God. He challenged them to a way of life, a way of forgiveness and prayer, a way of jubilee, which they could practice in their own villages.

What we call the Sermon on the Mount,⁷ you see, isn't simply a grand new moral code. It is a challenge to Jesus' hearers to be the true Israel, the light of the world. It cuts clean against the normal revolutionary kingdom agenda.

[Dramatization from Sermon on the Mount]

"Don't resist evil." "Turn the other cheek." "Go the second mile." These are not blanket invitations to be a doormat for Jesus, but rather a summons not to get involved in the violence of the resistance movement. You can't be the light of the world if all you want to do is fight the world off. The sermon ends with a coded but very sharp warning.

⁷ FROM THE SERMON ON MOUNT:

"Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you"

(Matthew 5:1-12 NIV).

Build your house on the rock, not on the sand. This is Temple⁸ language again. The real new Temple, the real house-on-the-rock,⁹ will consist of the community that builds its life upon Jesus' words. All other attempts to create a new Israel, a new Temple, a pure or revolutionary community, would be like building a house on the sand. It would fall with a great crash. There is a new way of being Israel, of being kingdom people, the light of the world.

The Startling Summons

Many of Jesus' hearers couldn't follow him on his travels. There were several whom he summoned to do just that. In particular, there was a group of twelve close associates. Now in that culture, if someone at the head of a new movement went among his followers, and without saying a word, beckoned twelve of them¹⁰ to come to one side with him, and then gave them a special role in his movement, that action itself would declare, more powerfully than any words could do, Here is the beginning of the new Israel! This is the start of the great renewal we've all been waiting for! In addition, Jesus summoned several hearers to give up all and come with him. Some he commissioned to share in the work of announcing the kingdom. And, ultimately, the challenge Jesus offered was the challenge to a crazy, subversive wisdom in which ordinary human wisdom, and conventional Jewish wisdom, would be stood on its head. Take up the cross, he said, and follow me. This was a call to embrace Jesus' own utterly risky vocation, to be the light of the world in a way the revolutionaries had never dreamed of. It was a call to follow Jesus into political danger and likely death, in the faith that by this means Israel's God would bring Israel through her present tribulations and out into the new day that would dawn.

The Severe Warning

When Jesus told this great kingdom story, he told it with an ending. Those who didn't hear and receive his message were warned that to refuse was to court certain disaster. Those who took the sword would perish with the sword. Those who refused his way of peace, his way of being the light of the world, would find that the way of holy brigandry, which they were embracing instead, was just as much a compromise with paganism as the way of collaboration which the Herods and the hated chief priests had chosen.

So Jesus regularly warned people of the certain conse-

⁸ **HEROD'S TEMPLE:** Herod's Temple (20 B.C.-A.D. 70) was begun in the eighteenth year of King Herod the Great's reign (37-4 B.C.). Herod's Temple was constructed after removing the old foundations. The old edifice, Zerubbabel's Temple, was a modest restoration of the Temple of Solomon destroyed by the Babylonian conquest. The central building was completed in just two years. The surrounding buildings and spacious courts were not completed until A.D. 64. The Temple was destroyed by the Romans during the Jewish War in A.D. 70. The Jewish temple that existed back then wasn't simply a large building in one part of the city. It's more that Jerusalem was a temple with a city around it! But the Temple wasn't just at the center of the city. It was also at the center of Jewish worship. They believed it was the center of the cosmos itself. (The Temple Mount—the sacred site on which King Solomon built the first temple—is now occupied by the Islamic Dome of the Rock.)

⁹ **THE HOUSE'S FOUNDATION:** Jesus taught them saying: "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash" (Matthew 7:24-27 NIV).

¹⁰ **JESUS' TWELVE ASSOCIATES:** "Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name 'Boanerges,' which means 'sons of thunder'); Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon (the Zealot), and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him" (Mark 3:13-19 NIV).

¹¹ **THE FALLING TOWER OF SILOAM:** Jesus refers to this unknown tower in Luke 13:4 (NIV): “Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?”

quences of not repenting. When someone told him that Pilate had killed some Galilean pilgrims in the Temple itself, his response was instructive: Unless you repent, you will all perish like that. And he amplified this by reminding them of a building that had collapsed¹¹ in southeast Jerusalem, killing eighteen people. Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. In this particular passage, Jesus wasn't talking about what happens to people when they die. There are plenty of other passages in the New Testament which offer explicit warnings on that topic. He had his eye on something more immediate. He was talking about Roman soldiers and falling buildings. He was warning that the alternative to his agenda was the path that led to head-on confrontation with Rome. But, since that path was the result of Israel's point-black refusal to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth, when Rome reacted and crushed Jerusalem, that wouldn't be a mere historical accident. That would be the wrath of God against Israel. No wonder people said Jesus sounded like Elijah or Jeremiah.

Clashing Symbols

Again and again in the gospels, we read of Jesus clashing with opponents who objected to his kingdom agenda, and the way he was acting it out. Often his opponents are called Pharisees.

The word “Pharisee” doesn't mean quite what we think it means. The Pharisees weren't just long-faced religious legalists. Nor were they a kind of official thought-police, snooping on all Jews and trying to make them keep the law more thoroughly. They were a self-appointed pressure group, most of whom had what we would call extreme right-wing political intentions: to keep Israel as holy as possible in order to fuel the revolution. One such Pharisee, whom we meet in the New Testament, was Saul of Tarsus, later known as Paul. He thought nothing of using holy violence to bring about his religious and political ends.

What stirred up opposition was what Jesus said and did in relation to the key Jewish symbols. In a world where family loyalty was a vital sign of Jewishness, Jesus announced that as far as he was concerned, anybody who did God's will was his mother, his sister, and his brother. In a world where the holy land was the most sacred possession of all, to be guarded and fought for, Jesus told people that their possessions would get in the way of their entry into the kingdom. In a world where the sabbath laws and the food laws marked out the Jew from his or her pagan

neighbors, Jesus cut through these taboos. His way of being Israel involved calling people to be the light of the world, not to hide surrounded by high walls. We shouldn't be surprised that this was unpopular, that it made people furious. That's what challenging symbols always does.

Jesus' Own Symbols

Everything Jesus did in his kingdom announcement said, in one way or another: I am bringing the new Israel into being. This is how the kingdom is coming. His call of the twelve disciples, his feastings and his healings, his suggestion that those who followed him constituted his real family—all of this pointed the same way. In addition, he hinted now and then that when his own kingdom work was complete, Gentiles¹² — outsiders — would come in and share the kingdom feast. This, after all, was the point of Israel's vocation in the first place, to be the covenant people of the God of Israel, through whom this God would make His light to shine on all the world.

By attempting to give shape and direction to a renewed Israel, what Jesus was doing, in effect, was offering a new understanding about the real intent and role of Torah, the Law which gave the shape and direction to God's people. When he challenged people to live by the rule of mutual forgiveness, he was giving them a way of life which was to function as a symbol, pointing to the reality of what God was doing in their midst. They were to be the returned-from-exile people, that is, the forgiveness-of-sins people. Not to live like that meant they would be cutting off the branch they were claiming to be sitting on. But, by giving them this rule, Jesus was declaring, in effect, that his way of life was the goal to which the Torah had all along been pointing.

All the lines of Jesus' symbolic actions lead our eyes up to the two great symbols in which he pulled together his whole agenda. We shall look at these: His action in the Temple, and his Last Supper with his friends. But before that, we must focus on the questions which are raised by Jesus' kingdom announcement. What did he think about how the Kingdom was coming?

The Kingdom Question

Once we put Jesus firmly in his first-century Jewish context, the question can be properly resolved. We can see how things worked if we look at the last great kingdom movement of the period. In what we call A.D. 132, Simeon ben-

¹² GENTILES: The Gentiles were people who were not part of God's chosen family at birth. The Jews considered them "pagans." The writer of Deuteronomy forbade communion with them (with "the nations"), their filthy ways and pagan worship. We find curses on "the nations" in the Psalms (Pss. 9, 59, 137). The ultimate punishment of Israel was being scattered among "the nations." Israel's mission was to bring justice (Isa. 42:1) and light to "the nations" (Isa. 49:6).

Early Christians quickly came to see Jesus as a light to the Gentiles (Matt. 4:16-17; Luke 2:32). Jesus' "Great Commission" included "all nations" (Matt. 28:19). At the house of Cornelius, the Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles (see Acts 10:45; 11:1; 18; 15:7). Paul was sent to preach among the Gentiles, and proclaimed an equal opportunity of salvation. For that, Paul experienced deep resentment among the Jews.

¹³ NUMBERS 24:17-19: "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth. Edom will be conquered; Seir, his enemy, will be conquered, but Israel will grow strong. A ruler will come out of Jacob and destroy the survivors of the city." (NIV)

Kosiba was hailed as Messiah by the greatest rabbi of the day, perhaps of any day: Rabbi Akiba. Akiba called him "the son of the star,"¹³ "bar-Kochba," echoing a well known messianic prophecy. Now from that moment on, as far as they were concerned, the kingdom of God had, in principle, arrived. Bar-Kochba went so far as to have coins minted, dating them from the year "1," signifying that he was inaugurating God's kingdom. He minted one just before Bar Kochba was defeated in 135 with the year "3" on it. This coin shows that he believed the kingdom had already begun. But if you'd asked him or anyone else whether the kingdom was as completely present as they wanted it to be, the answer was clearly "no." Not yet! What has to happen now is that the Romans have to be defeated! The Temple, destroyed two generations earlier, has to be rebuilt! What we have done has inaugurated the kingdom. Now it has to be implemented. In real terms, it makes perfect sense to think of the kingdom being both present and future. The first decisive battle has been fought. Now we have to consolidate and win the final victory.

So what did Jesus think was going to happen next? That's the question we must look at in the next two chapters.

Questions for Review

1. Who were the people who were “absolutely prohibited from holding office in the community” and why?
2. Who, then, could be a “real part” of the Jewish community?
3. Describe the life lived by a leper.
4. How were Jesus’ healings not only physical, but symbolic of his kingdom announcement?
5. How did Jesus shock his contemporaries?
6. What is the main message of the Prodigal Son story? Why is this story about “exile and restoration”?
7. What is a “parable”?
8. What are various levels of meaning in the words “repent” and “believe”? What did these words mean in Jesus’ culture?
9. Why were people so shocked when Jesus said “your sins are forgiven”?
10. According to Dr. Wright, what did Jesus really say in the “Sermon on the Mount”?
11. Name Jesus’ twelve close associates.
12. Who were the Pharisees? Why did Jesus’ words upset them?
13. How did Jesus “offer a new understanding about the real intent and role of Torah”?
14. Who was Simeon ben-Kosiba? When “bar-Kochba” had coins minted, dating them from the year “one,” what was he, in fact, saying?

For Deeper Examination and Study

WHO WERE THE PHARISEES?

- The Pharisees existed under Jonathan (160-143 B.C.), and declined in power under John Hyrcanus (134-104 B.C.) They began a resurgence under Salome Alexandra (76 B.C.). They were probably spiritual descendants of the Hasidim (religious freedom fighters of Judas Maccabeus' time).
- Pharisee means "the separated ones" for three probable reasons: 1. They wanted to separate themselves from other people. 2. They wanted to separate themselves so they could study the law. 3. They wanted to separate themselves from pagan practices.
- The Pharisees were the most numerous of the Jewish parties or sects. As members of the middle class, they were mostly merchants and tradesmen.

THE PHARISEES BELIEVED THAT:

1. There was one God, YHWH.
2. The Old Testament was their authority.
3. True worship was the study of law.
4. Both written and oral law was necessary to keep.
5. They must keep the proper rituals (Sabbath, tithing, and purification).
6. There was life after death and the resurrection of the body.
7. Demons and angels were real.
8. They should be missionaries to the Gentiles.
9. Individuals were responsible for how they lived.

In their activities, the Pharisees were the developers of the oral tradition. They taught that the way to God was through obedience to the law, and they changed Judaism from a religion of sacrifice to a religion of law. They were progressive thinkers and they often adapted the law to new situations. They violently opposed Jesus mainly because he wouldn't accept their teachings of the oral law. The Pharisees established and controlled the synagogues and exercised tremendous control over the people. They served as religious authorities for most Jews, and took several ceremonies from the Temple to the home. They emphasized ethical action (as opposed to theological action). They were legalistic and socially exclusive. They considered all non-Pharisees as unclean. And they were haughty and self-sufficient in their attitude.

For Deeper Examination and Study

“THE PHARISEES WEREN’T JUST LONG-FACED RELIGIOUS LEGALISTS

Nor were they a kind of official thought-police, snooping on all Jews and trying to make them keep the law more thoroughly. They were a self-appointed pressure-group most of whom had what we would call extreme right-wing political intentions: to keep Israel as holy as possible in order to fuel the revolution. One such Pharisee who we meet in the New Testament was Saul of Tarsus, later known as Paul; he thought nothing of using holy violence to bring about his religious and political ends.”

THE APOSTLE PAUL

Paul’s Jewish name was Saul. He was from the tribe of Benjamin. A Roman citizen, born in Tarsus, (now in eastern Turkey), *Paulos* or “Paul” was his official Roman name. Paul was well-educated in Jewish Scripture and tradition. He had the privilege to study in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, the famous rabbi. As a young Jewish boy, Paul also learned the trade of tent making using goat’s hair. Paul had a background that enabled him to become the greatest of all missionaries. He belonged to three worlds: Jewish (his parents were strictly orthodox Jews), Greek (the Greek culture permeated the eastern Mediterranean following the conquests of Alexander the Great in 335-323 B.C.), and Roman (Paul was a Roman citizen, which gave him freedom of movement, protection, and access to the higher strata of society).

As a strict Pharisee, however, Paul, before his conversion, zealously persecuted Christians and the church. He watched the execution of Stephen, and even held the coats of those who threw the stones, an act signifying judicial responsibility for his death. Sometime in the early 30s, Paul made a trip to Damascus to persecute Jewish Christians. As he neared Damascus, a bright light blinded him and knocked him to the ground. A voice then asked: “Why do you persecute me?” This Damascus Road experience led to Paul’s conversion and call to missions. It was a difficult ministry, characterized by pain, danger, and hard work. During his ministry, Paul made three missionary journeys, in A.D. 46-48; A.D. 49-52, and A.D. 53-57. After his final arrest and trial, as described in Acts, he was taken to Rome to await execution. Since he was a Roman citizen, Paul probably died by the sword (a Roman privilege), rather than by crucifixion. According to the tradition, he was beheaded in A.D. 64 by order of the emperor Nero. We know the Apostle Paul as the outstanding missionary and writer of the early church. Thirteen epistles in the New Testament have been attrib-

For Deeper Examination and Study

uted to Paul, twelve of which bear his name. Paul's theology was not well understood immediately after his death. It was Augustine who first gave full weight to Paul's theology.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE PHARISEES

At the height of their influence, we do not imagine the Pharisees acting, or even thinking of themselves, as a kind of secret thought-police. They were not an official body. They were not even the official teachers of Torah: that was one of the functions of the priesthood, both in Jerusalem and in the local community. They only obtained power if they colluded with or influenced another group who already possessed it.

The arrival of Roman rule in 63 B.C. and the rise of Herod in the late 40s and early 30s curtailed the possibilities of the Pharisees exerting actual power either in any official capacity. Neither the Romans nor Herod were in need of advice or support from the Pharisees.

The Pharisaic agenda remained what it had always been: to purify Israel by summoning her to return to the true ancestral traditions; to restore Israel to her independent theocratic status; and to be, as a pressure-group, in the vanguard of such movements by the study and practice of Torah.

Questions for Deeper Discussion

1. Examine, in detail, the story of the Prodigal Son. Why does the timing of his telling this story, better explain the meaning of this story? Do you agree with Dr. Wright's interpretation? Why or why not?
2. Describe some of Jesus' parables in terms of their "coded language." What new meanings do you find in them?
3. Discuss the meaning of *metanoesein kai pistos emoi genesesthai*. How does this Greek translate? What did Josephus mean when he said that? What did Jesus mean?
4. In regards to Jesus and the Pharisees, what is meant by "challenging symbols"? Why were they furious with Jesus?
5. Discuss Jesus' two "great symbols in which he pulled together his whole agenda": His action in the Temple, and his Last Supper with his friends.
6. Consider this statement regarding the "Sermon on the Mount" that Jesus taught: "Jesus was calling and challenging his contemporaries to be the people of God in a radically new way. He solemnly announced God's blessings—but he blessed all the wrong people: the poor, the mourners, the meek, the hungry, the merciful, the pure in heart, the persecuted, the peacemakers."
7. Read Isaiah 42:7 and discuss the meaning of this statement: "Jesus encouraged his disciples to see themselves as 'the light of the world,' comparing them to a city on a hill that cannot be hidden. In Old Testament times the prophet Isaiah had spoken of Israel's calling to be 'a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind.'"
8. Dr. Wright writes: "The whole sermon [Sermon on the Mount] is about taking the great risk of faith: that to change the world, right now, you need to believe that God is God, and to let that turn your national and personal priorities upside down. Like somebody learning how to dive, Jesus' hearers have to learn to let go, to throw themselves off their safe perch and trust themselves to the water." Consider the following question: "Can you imagine what people would say to a politician who made that the central plank of his campaign speech today?"
9. Who were the Pharisees and what did they believe? What was the "oral tradition"?
10. Tell the story of the Apostle Paul.

PROGRAM 3: LONGING FOR A KING

¹ **ISRAEL'S KING SAUL:** His name means "asked for," and he was the first king of Israel. The son of Kish (tribe of Benjamin), Saul was secretly anointed by Samuel. When he delivered Jabesh-gilead, he was acclaimed king at Gilgal. His reign is dated about 1020-1000 B.C. But, the spirit of the Lord left Saul. In its place, an evil spirit took over and tormented him. Saul became jealous of David after the young David killed the giant Goliath. He tried to kill David. Saul and his three sons were killed by the Philistines on Mount Gilboa the day after Saul consulted with the witch at Endor. David succeeded Saul as king.

² **ISRAEL'S KING DAVID:** His name means "favorite" or "beloved." David united Israel and Judah. He was the first to receive the promise of a royal Messiah in his line. He ruled from about 1005-965 B.C. A son of Jesse, God sent Samuel to anoint a replacement for Saul. David worked as a shepherd. He had great musical talent and a reputation as a fighter. He brought victory to the Israelites when he defeated Goliath. David married Michal, Saul's daughter. Jonathan, Saul's son, became David's beloved friend. David was a successful and great king. Later in life, however, David committed adultery with Bathsheba, another man's wife, and she became pregnant. David had her husband Uriah killed in battle. The child Bathsheba carried died after birth. David married Bathsheba, and they produced Solomon. David made extensive plans for the building of the Temple, but his son Solomon actually built the Temple. God's prophets pointed to a future David who would restore Israel's fortunes: "Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it...." (Isaiah 9:7 NIV)

³ **ISRAEL'S KING SOLOMON:** The name Solomon means "his peace." The tenth son of David, he was the second son of Bathsheba. As the third king of Israel, he reigned forty years (about 1000 B.C.). Solomon is remembered most for his wisdom (see 1 Kings 3:16 and 1 Kings 10), his Temple building (see 1 Kings 5-8), his wealth, and his writings (see 1 Kings 4:32). Solomon was an ancestor of Jesus (see Matt. 1:6-7).

Solomon, however, had his faults: "King Solomon...loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites. They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, 'You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.' Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been...." (1 Kings 11:1-4, 6 NIV)

[Dramatization of Luke 4:18-21]

Did Jesus really believe he was the Messiah? That's the question that regularly surfaces when people start to discuss what he was up to. In order to get a handle on it, we need to stop for a moment and think about what first-century Jews meant when they talked of a Messiah.

The Messiah

The word "Messiah" means "the anointed one," and it regularly referred to royalty, to a king. But what sort of a king did they expect or want? What would this king do for them?

When Jews thought about God sending them a king, it was always part of their hope that God would liberate them once and for all from their pagan oppressors. That's what their first kings, Saul¹ and David,² had done. Actually, Saul hadn't been so successful, which was why David replaced him. All the way through Jewish history, fighting off the pagans was one of the primary tasks that a king was supposed to accomplish.

And there was a second task that became associated with the monarchy. David, according to the Jewish scriptures, had planned the building of the Temple, and his son, Solomon,³ built it. These two tasks then follow the monarchy throughout the next thousand years. The greatest kings of the early period, Hezekiah⁴ and Josiah,⁵ saw off the pagans and cleanse the Temple. The would-be king after the Babylonian exile,⁶ Zerubbabel,⁷ didn't do either task successfully. We don't hear of any more kings from David's family thereafter.

Revolutionaries

But, in the second century B.C., Judas Maccabaeus defeated the Syrian oppressors and purified the Temple. (This is the event which is remembered and celebrated in Hanukkah.⁸) That was enough to establish his family as Israel's royal house for the next hundred years, even though he wasn't from the family of David. Then, as the Maccabean dynasty grew weaker, a young upstart called Herod fought a successful battle against the Parthians (or

Iranians), the Eastern enemy that the Romans used to worry about. So the Romans installed him as king of the Jews. And he set about legitimating himself in the eyes of the Jews by rebuilding the Temple on a magnificent scale.

All through the first century A.D., as revolutionary would-be royal movements emerge, the agenda is quite clear. Defeat the Romans. Get rid of the present high priestly family (whom many Jews regarded as usurpers). And reclaim the Temple for the true worship of God. Several revolutionary movements came and went. Two of the best known are those of Simon bar-Giora and Simeon ben-Kosiba. Simon bar-Giora was one of the great leaders during the war between the Jews and the Romans in 66-70. He was taken off to Rome to be ceremonially killed at the end of the Roman triumph (which was depicted in the famous "Arch of Titus" in Rome).

Simon's aim was, clearly, to defeat the Romans and restore the Temple. The last great would-be Messiah, bar-Kochba, who led the revolt from 132 to 135, had a picture of the Temple as his chosen symbol on one of the coins he minted. Battle and Temple defined royalty.

This helps us to understand how first century Jews read and understood their scriptures. They looked back to passages like God's great promise to David, and to the Psalms which celebrated the Davidic dynasty. They cherished prophecies which spoke of a coming king who would bring about a new era of justice and peace. And they prayed and hoped and waited for it to happen. They wrote new texts of their own, picking up the scriptural imagery and developing it, focusing it on their own day. The king would smash the Gentiles in pieces like a potter's vessel. He would be like a lion coming out of the forest, the Lion of Judah, to challenge the great Roman eagle and bring about its downfall. He would be like the Son of Man in Daniel's vision, exalted in triumph over the monsters that had oppressed God's people. And when he had done his work, he would be ruler over all the earth.

Here Comes the King!

Among the prophecies of a coming king was a striking passage in the book of Zechariah. The prophet declares that God will encamp at his house (the Temple) like a guard, so that no one shall march to and fro. How will he do this?

The prophet answers with a royal announcement:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!

⁴ **HEZEKIAH:** Hezekiah began his reign at age 25. He was the son and successor of Ahaz as king of Judah (716/15-687/86 B.C.). He reopened the Jerusalem Temple and removed the idols. He sanctified desecrated Temple vessels for use in the Temple. In 701 B.C., Hezekiah became ill. When Isaiah warned the king he was going to soon die, Hezekiah prayed to God. God answered him by promising Hezekiah fifteen more years of life and deliverance of Jerusalem from Assyria. Hezekiah died in 687/86 B.C., and was succeeded by Manasseh, his son. Hezekiah was an ancestor of Jesus.

⁵ **JOSIAH:** His name means "Yahweh heals." He became Judah's king at age eight, and reigned from about 640-609 B.C. He succeeded his wicked father Amon, who was murdered by his servants after only two years as king. During his twelfth year on the throne, Josiah initiated a religious purge of Jerusalem, Judah, and the surrounding areas (see 2 Chron. 34:3-7). When, in his eighteenth year as king, a "Book of the Law" was discovered during Temple repairs (see 2 Kings 22), Josiah tore his clothes and humbled himself before God. The reading of this book prompted Josiah to seriously reform Israel. (Scholars think the "Book of the Law" may have been portions of the Old Testament book, Deuteronomy.) At age 39, Josiah was fatally wounded in battle (see 2 Kings 23:29) and was buried in Jerusalem. The people greatly loved Josiah. "Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did...." (2 Kings 23:25 NIV)

⁶ **BABYLONIAN EXILE:** Babylon was located in southern Mesopotamia in Old Testament times. It became a large empire that absorbed Judah and destroyed Jerusalem. Around 604-603 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar II was king of Babylon, Jehoiakim was king of Judah. In December of 598, Nebuchadnezzar marched on Jerusalem. That same month, Jehoiakim died. His son Jehoiachin (on March 16, 597 B.C.) surrendered the city to the Babylonians. Many Judeans, including the royal family, were deported to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah over Judah. Zedekiah revolted against Babylon in 589 B.C. The city fell in August of 587 B.C. Zedekiah was captured. "He set fire to the temple of the Lord, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down" (2 Kings 25:9 NIV). Many more Judeans were taken to their exile in Babylonia: "So Judah went into captivity, away from her land." (Jeremiah 52:28 NIV). (For more detail, see also 2 Kings 25:1-21; Jer. 52:1-30).

Exile itself is to be understood as a sacrifice. This understanding of Israel's own sufferings, or those of a representative or group, as somehow redemptive, effective to deliver the rest of the nation from the time of the divine wrath, is picked up most clearly in the language attributed to the Maccabean martyrs: "For we are suffering because of our own sins. And if our living Lord is angry for a little while, to rebuke and discipline us, he will again be reconciled with his own servants.... I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our ancestors, appealing to God to show mercy soon to our nation and by trials and plagues to make you [i.e. Antiochus Epiphanes] confess that he alone is God."

⁷ **ZERUBBABEL:** He was the grandson of King Jehoiachin, and one of the leaders who returned from the Babylonian exile. When Darius (the Persian emperor) granted the Jews permission to rebuild the Temple, Zerubbabel (then governor) helped to complete it in 515 B.C.

⁸ **HANUKKAH:** This feast is the eight-day festival commemorating Judas Maccabaeus' cleansing and rededication of the Temple (167 B.C.). It is referred to in John 10:22 where it is called the "feast of dedication": "Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade" (NIV). Hanukkah, commemorating the overthrow of Antiochus Epiphanes by Judas and his followers, underlined the vital importance of true monotheistic worship and the belief that when the tyrants raged against Israel, her god would come to the rescue.

⁹ **JESUS RIDES ON A DONKEY—THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY:** "As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.'

"The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Hosanna in the highest!' When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, 'Who is this?' The crowds answered, 'This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee'" (Matt. 21:1-3; 6-11 NIV).

There are almost certain intentional "Maccabaeian" echoes to the triumphal entry. The so-called "triumphal entry" was clearly messianic. All that we know of Jewish crowds at Passover-time in this period makes their reaction, in all the accounts, thoroughly comprehensible: they praise their god for the arrival, at last, of the true king.

¹⁰ **JEREMIAH:** Son of Hilkiah, a priest from Anathoth, Jeremiah was called to be a prophet around 627/6 B.C., in the thirteenth year of King Josiah: "The word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations'" (Jeremiah 1:4-5 NIV). When Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 B.C., Jeremiah moved to Mizpah. He was then deported to Egypt against his will. There he preached. Jeremiah lived in constant conflict with the political and religious authorities of his people. He constantly proclaimed God's judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem.

*Look, your king comes to you;
Triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,⁹
on a colt, the foal of a donkey...*

*He shall command peace to the nations;
His dominion shall be from sea to sea,
And from the River (the Euphrates) to the ends of the
earth.*

How will this affect Israel herself? The prophet continues:
*As for you also, because of the blood of My covenant with
you,*

I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;

Today I declare that I will restore to you double. (Zech. 9:9-12)

In other words, when the true King arrives, His worldwide rule will bring about liberation for Israel, because of God's solemn covenant which He will at last renew.

When Jesus came to Jerusalem, at the great climax of his public work, there can be no doubt that he intended his actions to be seen as making a royal claim. Like David, he came to Jerusalem to claim his kingdom. Like Judas Maccabaeus, he entered the city with palm branches waving all around him. It was a messianic symbol, a messianic demonstration.

Like so many other would-be royal figures, Jesus then went into the Temple and performed a powerful symbolic action. But, though people often refer to this as Jesus' "cleansing of the Temple," Jesus didn't intend to reform the system. He was acting like another prophet, Jeremiah.¹⁰ He was doing something which symbolized something quite different—the Temple's destruction.

Jeremiah had confronted the Temple rulers of his day, who were using the Temple as a sort of magic symbol to assure themselves that they were really secure, while at the same time, ignoring God's plea that they act with holiness and justice:

Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to idols, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say "We are safe!" Only then to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight?...Therefore I will do to the house that is called by My name, in which you trust, just what I did to Shiloh (destroy it).

Jeremiah performed symbolic actions to focus his words.

He took a pot and smashed it,¹¹ symbolizing God's destruction of the Temple. Jesus did something similar. (To get the point, we need to remind ourselves that the Temple was to be the place of sacrifice, the place where God met with His people in love and grace.) For sacrifices, you needed pure animals. It was no good bringing an animal from a long distance, because it might get hurt, maimed, or killed on the way. The farms of the Judaeen hill country produced thousands of animals for sacrifice in the Temple. But to buy these you needed the proper money. Jesus didn't intend to stop the Temple functioning forever. He wasn't attempting actually to take it over. If he had, he'd have been arrested either by the Temple guards or by the Romans. By overturning the tables of the moneychangers, and preventing the sale of sacrificial animals, Jesus was making a powerful symbolic statement.¹² Like Jeremiah smashing his pot, he was declaring that God was about to bring judgment upon this place. This was a messianic demonstration with a difference.

What About John?

Some of the central things Jesus was wanting to say could best be said in symbolic actions. But he regularly surrounded these actions with riddles, cryptic sayings that hinted at the true meaning of what he'd done. The first of these comes when people asked him where he got the authority to act as he had in the Temple.

Jesus responds with a counter-question about John the Baptist. Was John sent from God? Or did he just emerge from among the people, without divine authority? His interrogators can't answer this. They'll get in trouble either way. But it wasn't just a trick to shut them up.

Whenever Jesus refers to John the Baptist, he always hints that John was the last great prophet before the arrival of the King. The Jews cherished a scriptural prophecy in which the prophet Elijah will return before the final day dawns. Jesus declared that John was Elijah. That wasn't so much a statement about John. It was a statement about Jesus himself. So when Jesus asks his hearers what they think of John, the strong hint is that Jesus has his authority because he was John's successor. He had been anointed with the Spirit in John's baptism. He was the Messiah.

[Dramatization of Luke 20:9-18]

¹¹ **JEREMIAH SMASHES POT:** "This is what the Lord says: 'Go and buy a clay jar from a potter. Take along some of the elders of the people and of the priests and go out to the Valley of Ben Hinnom, near the entrance of the Potsherd Gate. There proclaim the words I tell you, and say, 'Hear the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah and people of Jerusalem. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Listen! I am going to bring a disaster on this place that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. For they have forsaken me and made this a place of foreign gods; they have burned sacrifices in it to gods that neither they nor their fathers nor the kings of Judah ever knew, and they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent. They have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as offerings to Baal—something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind. So beware, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when people will no longer call this place Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter....' Then break the jar while those who go with you are watching, and say to them, 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: I will smash this nation and this city just as this potter's jar is smashed and cannot be repaired....'" (Jeremiah 19:1-6; 10-11 NIV) (Also see Jeremiah 52: The fall of Jerusalem.)

¹² **JESUS CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE:** "On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, 'Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." But you have made it a den of robbers'" (Mark 11:15-17 NIV).

¹³ **ISAIAH 5—THE SONG OF THE VINEYARD:** “I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.

“Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it.

“The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress” (Isaiah 5:1-7 NIV).

¹⁴ **THE LANDOWNER AND THE TENANTS:** “[Jesus] then began to speak to them in parables: ‘A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.

“He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But the tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come, and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others” (Mark 12:1-9 NIV).

¹⁵ **PSALM 118:** “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes” (Ps. 118:22-23 NIV).

¹⁶ **DANIEL 2 — THE LARGE STATUE:** “You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth....” (Daniel 2:31-35 NIV)

Jesus then proceeds to tell a story about a farmer who lets his vineyard¹³ out to tenants¹⁴ and sends messengers to get the fruit. His hearers would know easily enough that the nation of Israel was the vineyard, God was the farmer, and the present Jews, particularly their leaders, were the tenants. The story picks up a similar one in the prophet Isaiah.

Jesus develops the story. Down the years, God has sent messengers to Israel, prophets who have urged her to follow her true vocation, to be the light of the world. Israel has refused. God is now sending one last prophet, a prophet with a difference: He is the owner’s son. (We must remember that in this period the phrase “son of God” was a regular title for the Messiah.) But the tenants reject him, too, and kill him. What then will the owner do? He will destroy the tenants, and give the vineyard to others. This story, remember, is explaining what Jesus has just done in the Temple, and why. He has symbolized the Temple’s destruction. He has come as the Owner’s son, the Messiah, and the Jewish leaders have refused to listen to his warnings. They will kill him, but the result will be the destruction of the Temple, their central symbol and power base.

Jesus elaborates this riddle with another one. He quotes from a Psalm which speaks of pilgrims going to the Temple. “The stone¹⁵ which the builders refused has become the head of the corner.” God is building a true Temple, using the one who is at present being rejected.

But who is the “stone”? In a prophecy from Daniel,¹⁶ the succession of pagan kingdoms is seen in terms of a great statue, with a head of gold and feet of clay. A stone is cut out of a mountain, and smashes the statue on its feet of clay. The stone then becomes a mountain which fills the whole earth. This would be interpreted in Jesus’ day as referring to the coming king who would destroy the evil empires of the world and establish the kingdom of God. The stone and the son are one and the same, as any Jew with an ear for language would see, because of the play on words between *eben* and *ben*. Jesus had come as the true king. He would be rejected, but God would destroy the Temple and establish Jesus’ kingship instead.

Taxes to Caesar?

This leads to one of the most cryptic of Jesus’ messianic riddles. They ask him: Should we give tribute to Caesar?¹⁷ This is a deliberate trap: The last great would-be Messiah before Jesus had started a tax revolt, and if they can get

Jesus to say that's his intention too, they can hand him over to Rome. Alternatively, if he says you should pay the tax, the ordinary people will no longer take him seriously as a messianic claimant.

Jesus begins by asking to see a coin, forcing them to admit that they possess Roman money. They gave him a coin called a **denarius**,¹⁸ issued by the emperor Tiberius. On this coin is an image and inscription that good Jews would regard as blasphemous and therefore not to be handled. Around the head of the Emperor was an abbreviated title: "Tiberius Caesar, Emperor, Son of the Divine Augustus." Son of God, indeed! Any self-respecting Messiah ought to reject such nonsense outright.

We can understand what Jesus then said if we go back to another Judas, this time our old friend, Judas Maccabaeus. When his aged father, **Matthias**,¹⁹ was giving him his marching orders on how to be a good Jewish revolutionary against the Syrians, his last words were these: "Pay back the Gentiles what they deserve, and keep the commandments of God." Now obviously what he meant by that was not "pay taxes"! It was "give them what they deserve. In other words, smash them to smithereens!" It was a call to arms, to revolution. But the call was tempered by the obligation to God: Keep God's laws. Be zealous for God, and be zealous to defeat God's enemies.

Jesus says to his questioners: Pay Caesar back what Caesar deserves! Now if he'd said that in Galilee, off the top of his head, it would have been a clear call to revolution. Saying it when looking at a Roman coin, it suddenly sounds different. He isn't saying "start a revolution," but nor is he saying he is happy about the tax. They can hear both messages, and something beyond. "Pay God back what God deserves." In other words, be the people God called you to be. Offer God what God deserves. That's what the Temple was there to do. But Jesus is calling his hearers to a new way of being God's people, a way which will make the Temple redundant, irrelevant. That's been Jesus' primary message all through. Yes, he is starting a messianic movement. But no, it isn't the normal sort of thing, a tax revolt followed by military action. It is a summons to Israel to be the people of God she was always called to be. Jesus is fighting the real battle, building the real Temple. He is the Messiah.

How Jesus Will Be Vindicated

All Jesus' symbolic and spoken warnings about the Temple lead, in the Gospels, to a long discourse, spoken

¹⁷ **PAYING TAXES TO CAESAR:** "Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?' But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, 'You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.' They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, 'Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?' 'Caesar's,' they replied. Then he said to them, 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.' When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away" (Matthew 22:15-22 NIV).

(Caesar was the family name of the founder of the Roman Empire. When Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C., his successors kept alive his memory and used his name as a title. New Testament Caesars included Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, and probably Nero.)

¹⁸ **DENARIUS:** A denarius was the typical day's wage for an ordinary laborer (see Matt. 20:2).

¹⁹ **MATTATHIAS' LAST WORDS TO HIS SONS:** "Judas Maccabaeus has been a mighty warrior from his youth; he shall command the army for you and fight the battle against the peoples. You shall rally around you all who observe the law, and avenge the wrong done to your people. Pay back the Gentiles in full, and obey the commands of the law" (1 Macc. 2:66-8).

Jesus' cryptic saying should be understood as a coded and subversive echo of Mattathias' last words. His Temple-action, at the head of a kingdom-movement, carrying clear messianic overtones for those with ears to hear, and reinforced by the riddles about destruction and rebuilding, about John the Baptist, and about the "son" and the "stone," created a context within which his saying would have meant: "Pay Caesar back what he is owed! Render to Caesar what he deserves!"

When, however, the words are set in context, they acquire a second layer of meaning. Jesus was not in a classroom giving a lecture...He was facing a questioner with a Roman coin in his hand. Suddenly a counterpoint appears beneath the coded revolutionary meaning; faced with the coin, and with the implicit question of revolution, Jesus says, in effect, "Well then, you'd better pay Caesar back as he deserves!" Had he told them to revolt? Had he told them to pay the tax? He had done neither. He had done both.

solemnly on the Mount of Olives overlooking the Temple, in which Jesus predicts that the Temple will indeed be destroyed and that he will be thereby vindicated.

That isn't how the passage is usually read. People have routinely supposed that the language about the sun and the moon being darkened, and the stars falling from heaven, was all about the end of the space-time world. But, as we have seen previously, this was a deliberate and metaphorical way of speaking about the fall and rise of great empires, great regimes, great institutions. They would have no difficulty understanding Jesus to be talking about the destruction of the Temple (as the prophets had before him). They would see that as the wrath of God on His people, who had refused to heed His call.

²⁰ **JESUS' PREDICTION:** "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens" (Mark 13:26-27 NIV).

At the heart of the discourse, Jesus says that in those days they will see the son of man coming on a cloud²⁰ with power and great glory. We would be quite wrong to suppose that this was a prediction of a literal descent to earth, sitting on a cloud, of a human being, whether Jesus himself or some other. There are plenty of passages in the New Testament which speak plainly about the future "appearing" or "coming" of Jesus, in the sense of his "return," at the time when God makes the "new heavens and new earth" promised in scripture. But this passage about the son of man is about something different. It was a direct quotation from the prophet Daniel. It was from a passage which we know was being regarded in the first century as referring to the triumph and vindication of the Messiah. The Daniel passage speaks of great monsters, representing the pagan nations, making war on a human figure, representing Israel. When things are at their worst, the Ancient of Days (a reference to God, obviously) will take His seat, and the son of man will be vindicated, lifted up, to sit on a throne beside him. The "coming of the son of man" means his exaltation, his triumph, after his suffering.

Jesus applies this to himself and his whole movement. The Temple represents the evil regime that has opposed him and his message of peace, his call to Israel to be the light of the world. It will be destroyed. He will be vindicated. This is a further clear statement of Jesus' messianic authority.

Jesus on Trial

When we consider what Jesus had done during his few days in Jerusalem, we shouldn't be at all surprised that people were out to get him. The authorities must have been seriously worried about the effect of a movement like this,

challenging the very basis of their power, causing a disturbance when the city was full of pilgrims and the Roman guards were most likely to be jumpy. With the help of Judas,²¹ one of Jesus' close associates, the authorities are able to arrest Jesus and interrogate him. It's not clear that this was a formal trial in the full legal sense. But the interrogation fits exactly into the picture we have been outlining.

The High Priest Caiaphas,²² who was the senior figure in the Jewish government in Jerusalem, begins by asking Jesus what he meant by his words and actions in the Temple. Witnesses are produced to say that Jesus threatened to destroy the temple personally, and to build another one in its place. Presumably, at least a garbled report of his prophetic warnings had leaked out. Jesus doesn't answer the question. He would need to explain quite a lot of things to Caiaphas before he could make his agenda clear.

So Caiaphas moves on to the obvious next question. Temple and Messiah go hand in hand. If Jesus is threatening the Temple, does he think he is the Messiah, the one whom scripture calls the Son of God? This time Jesus replies, and basically says "yes." But he amplifies this with a double quotation, drawing together two passages which Jews of his day would have recognized as making a messianic claim and the further claim that he, this Messiah, would be vindicated over his oppressors. Psalm 110 and Daniel 7 tell us: "You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." This not only affirms that, yes, Jesus believes he is God's Messiah. It also underlines his belief that he will be vindicated, and that the present regime (high priest, Temple, the lot) will be destroyed. Caiaphas, naturally, regards all this as blasphemous nonsense.

But it isn't just blasphemy. It is also the political leverage Caiaphas needs. If Jesus has confessed to royal, messianic aspirations, that is enough to send him to the Romans on a charge of sedition. And the Romans will know what to do with him. Pontius Pilate,²³ the Roman governor, wouldn't have given a couple of olives for Jewish scruples about the Temple or blasphemy. But he had to take notice of a would-be king. Jesus was sent to his death on a charge of being a messianic pretender. He took his place in a long line. This was what the Romans routinely did to failed Messiahs.

The question we then have to face is this: Was this Jesus' intention? If so, why? That's what we'll deal with in the next chapter.

²¹ **JUDAS' BETRAYAL:** "Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: 'The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.' Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, 'Rabbi!' and kissed him. The men seized Jesus and arrested him" (Mark 14:43-46).

²² **HIGH PRIEST CAIAPHAS:** Matthew says that Jesus was taken to Caiaphas the High Priest (Mark and Luke don't name him); John, that he was taken to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas. John has a longer conversation, in which Annas, described as the High Priest, asks Jesus about his followers and his teaching. Jesus' reply earns him a blow on the face, the legitimacy of which he challenges; Annas then sends him to Caiaphas, whence he is taken, without more reported questioning, to Pilate.

²³ **PONTIUS PILATE:** First Timothy 6:13 tells us Pontius Pilate was the magistrate under whom Jesus suffered. He came to power about A.D. 26. As an anti-Semite and governor of Judea (also called "procurator" or "prefect"), he consistently provoked the Jewish people and defied their religious laws. A group of Jerusalem priests tried to convince Pilate into believing that Jesus was a serious threat to Jewish or Roman political power. (See Luke 23:1-38.) To further irritate the Jews, Pilate had inscribed on Jesus's cross: "This is the King of the Jews" (Luke 23:38). Legend says that Pilate later committed suicide.

Questions for Review

1. What does the word “messiah” mean?
2. What is meant by “Hanukkah”? What event is remembered?
3. Discuss the following: “All through the first century A.D., as revolutionary would-be royal movements emerge, the agenda is quite clear. Defeat the Romans.” Did the Jewish people expect the messiah to defeat the Romans? Why?
4. How did the Jews read and understand their scriptures concerning the coming messiah?
5. Jesus entered Jerusalem with palm branches waving around him. Why and how was this act a messianic symbol?
6. Describe Jesus’ “cleansing of the Temple.” What did he mean by this action?
7. When Jesus declared that John the Baptist was Elijah, what did this statement say about Jesus himself? Why?
8. In light of Daniel’s prophecy, what did Jesus mean when he said: “The stone which the builders refused has become the head of the corner”? Discuss the play on words between *eben* and *ben*.
9. How did Jesus answer those who tried to trap him with the question: “Should we give tribute to Caesar?” Why was this question intended as a trap?
10. Who was Caiaphas? Why did he regard Jesus’ words as “blasphemous nonsense”?
11. Why was Jesus sentenced to death?

For Deeper Examination and Study

REVOLUTION

Under certain circumstances, provocation by those in power could become so acute that revolt would follow. This was illustrated by the events a decade after Herod's death (in A.D. 6). To begin with, the Jews appealed to Rome against Archelaus, who had succeeded his father Herod in Judaea, Samaria, and Idumaea. His subjects went over his head to Rome and had him removed.

The second, more serious, incident was occasioned by the imposition of a Roman census, whose implications were not merely economic but, to a Jew, theological: enrolling in Rome's system meant admitting that the land and people were not after all sacred to Israel's God. Judas "the Galilean" led the revolt which, according to Josephus, was the founding act of the sect that became responsible for the major war two generations later.

Most of the revolutionary activity during the next sixty years was a response to perceived provocation. The removal of Archelaus meant that Judaea became a Roman province in its own right rather than a client kingdom overseen from neighboring Syria. Successive "procurators" acted in more or less crass and heavy-handed style, which naturally had the effect of inciting Jews towards revolt. We know of at least seven such incidents in the ten years of Pontius Pilate's procuratorship (A.D. 26-36):

- Pilate tried to bring Roman standards into Jerusalem, but backed down after a mass protest.
- He used money from the Temple treasury to build an aqueduct and crushed the resistance that this action provoked.
- He sent troops to kill some Galileans while they were offering sacrifices in the Temple, presumably because he feared a riot.
- He captured and condemned to death the leader of an uprising that had taken place in Jerusalem involving murder; he then released the man as a gesture of goodwill during the Passover feast.
- At the same Passover, he faced a quasi-messianic movement, having some association with resistance movements; he crucified its leader along with two ordinary revolutionaries.
- He provoked public opinion by placing Roman votive shields, albeit without images, in the palace at Jerusalem, which according to Philo annoyed Tiberius almost as much as it did the Jews.
- Finally, he suppressed with particular brutality a popular (and apparently non-revolutionary) prophetic movement in Samaria. For this he was accused before the Roman legate in Syria, who had him sent back to Rome.

For Deeper Examination and Study

OTHER REVOLUTIONS AND REVOLUTIONARIES

Emperor Gaius, incensed by an anti-Roman incident at Jamnia, tried to insist on a huge statue of himself being placed in the Temple in Jerusalem in deliberate contravention of Jewish law and scruple.... Only his early death forestalled the blasphemous act and its horrendous possible consequences.

A brief respite from continual provocation occurred during the reign of Herod Agrippa, a grandson of Herod the Great, whom the Romans allowed to rule in place of the procurators from 41 until his early death in 44. His apparent piety and his care to avoid offending Jewish scruples held revolutionary tendencies at bay. But with the resumption of procuratorial rule we hear of renewed insurgent movements.

Tholomaeus, a "brigand chief," was executed by Cuspius Fadus in the mid-40s, during the course of a large operation against brigandage in general. Around the same time a leader named Theudas, claiming to be a prophet, led a movement which aroused enough popular support to gain mention in Acts as well as Josephus. It too was put down by the Romans, and Theudas himself was executed.

We then hear of the two sons of Judas the Galilean, Jacob and Simon, being crucified under the procuratorship of Tiberius Alexander (46-8), and of subsequent revolts under his successor Cumanus (48-52), including a riot at Passover in which perhaps 20,000 Jews were killed, attacks by brigands on Romans, and further looting of the Temple by Roman troops. Cumanus overreacted to a subsequent incident, whose complexity nicely illustrates the problems of the time. Some Galileans were murdered on their way through Samaria to Jerusalem for a festival. The Jews took violent revenge on Samaria. Cumanus responded with even more violence, out of all proportion to the original incidents. The Jews then successfully accused Cumanus before Claudius the emperor of having favored the Samaritans. The ringleaders of the Jewish fighters, Eleazar ben Deinaeus and Alexander, were finally captured by Cumanus' successor Felix (52-60), who proceeded, as Fadus had done in 44-46, to purge the country of *lestai*, crucifying a considerable number.

The purge was only short-lived. Josephus says that around this time (the late 50s and early 60s) there arose the group he called Sicarii, the "daggersmen." In addition, groups whom Josephus refers to as "false prophets" were operating in the Judaeian desert. An Egyptian Jew led a mass movement which assembled on the Mount of Olives and promised them that the city walls would fall

For Deeper Examination and Study

down and allow them to enter in triumph. His followers, numbering thousands, were cut down by the Romans while he himself escaped and was not heard of again.

There were also riots over Jewish social status at Caesarea and plenty of further evidence of brigand activity. Among the first acts of Felix's successor as procurator, Porcius Festus (60-2), was to execute an "imposter" who had promised his followers "salvation and rest from troubles," and to deal with a strange itinerant Jew who had been arraigned before Felix on a charge of inciting riots by offending Jewish scruples. Despite further executions of *lestai*, movements of revolt spread faster, fanned by the insensitive actions of Festus' two successors, Luceius Albinus (62-5) and the notorious Gessius Florus (65-6), who, being unable to control the brigands, actually gave them support and, according to Josephus, shared their plunder.

This brief list of movements of revolt in the years preceding the war gives sufficient indication of the mood of the country as a whole. Revolution of one sort or another was in the air, and often present on the ground, both in Galilee and (particularly) in Jerusalem, throughout the period of Roman rule. It was not confined to one group. Whenever it was suppressed in one place, it sprang up in another. The same seems to have been true even after the devastation of the war. Certainly when bar-Kochba was proclaimed Messiah, large numbers from the whole country were ready to rise and attempt once more to throw off the Roman yoke.

JESUS CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE

"On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, 'Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." But you have made it a den of robbers'" (Mark 11:15-17 NIV).

What did Jesus' actions in the Temple mean?

- Jesus intended to symbolize the imminent destruction of the Temple.
- Jesus believed that Israel's God was in the process of judging and redeeming his people, not just as one such incident among many but as the climax of Israel's whole history.

For Deeper Examination and Study

- The judgment on the Temple would take the form of destruction by Rome, which (like Babylon, according to Jeremiah) would be the agent of the wrath of YHWH.
- The specific reasons for this judgment were, broadly, Israel's failure to obey YHWH's call to be his people; more narrowly, Israel's large-scale commitment to national rebellion, coupled with her failure to enact justice within her own society, not least within the Temple-system itself.
- Jesus symbolized the destruction of the Temple. This was more than a mere intention to replace the present Temple with a new one. It included a critique of the present Temple.

CRUCIFIXION OF REBELS IN THE ROMAN WORLD

Crucifixion was a powerful symbol throughout the Roman world. It was not just a means of liquidating undesirables; it did so with the maximum degradation and humiliation. It said, loud and clear: we are in charge here; you are our property; we can do what we like with you. It insisted, coldly and brutally, on the absolute sovereignty of Rome, and of Caesar. It told an implicit story, of the uselessness of rebel recalcitrance and the ruthlessness of imperial power. It said, in particular: this is what happens to rebel leaders. Crucifixion was a symbolic act with a clear and frightening meaning.

Questions for Deeper Discussion

1. Did Jesus really believe he was the Messiah? What did first-century Jews mean when they talked of a Messiah? What does “Messiah” refer to? What sort of king did the Jews expect and want?
2. Study the revolutionary movements of Simon bar-Giora and Simeon ben-Kosiba, and discuss in detail.
3. What significance did “riding the donkey” and “waving palm branches” have when Jesus entered Jerusalem? How was he like David? How was he like Judas Maccabaeus?
4. How was Jesus acting like Jeremiah when he “cleansed the Temple”? In what way was he symbolizing the Temple’s destruction? Describe the function of the Temple. How was this action a “messianic demonstration with a difference”?
5. Discuss the wisdom used by Jesus when he told his questioners: Pay Caesar back what Caesar deserves! What would have happened if he had made that statement in Galilee? What two messages do his listeners hear and why? In light of the history of Judas Maccabaeus and his father, how was this question meant to trap Jesus?
6. Explain and examine Judaism’s history of revolution.
7. What statement did the Roman empire make when it crucified rebels?

PROGRAM 4:

WHY DID JESUS DIE?

¹ **CRUCIFIXION:** “‘What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?’ Pilate asked. They all answered, ‘Crucify him!’ ‘Why? What crime has he committed?’ asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, ‘Crucify him!’ When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood,’ he said. ‘It is your responsibility!’” (Matt. 27:22-24 NIV).

We know for certain that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified. That is one of the most secure facts in the history of the world. But on the other hand, we know that literally thousands of other Jews were crucified within fifty years either side of Jesus. It is the resurrection that made Jesus’ crucifixion special.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is thought by many to be built on the site of Jesus’ crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. The outcrop of rock believed to be Golgotha—“the place of a skull”—and the traditional catacomb of Joseph of Arimathea are both located within the extensive building.

² **THE MEANING OF CRUCIFIXION:** Crucifixion, though common in the Roman world, was so utterly horrible that it was not mentioned in polite society. The Roman world was largely unanimous that crucifixion was a horrific, disgusting business. Crucifixion was the most painful and degrading form of capital punishment in the ancient world. The Greeks and Romans at first crucified only slaves. They thought it was too barbaric for anyone but a slave. But by the first century, crucifixion was used to kill any enemy of the state. Later, Romans began to use it to deter crime. By Jesus’ time, crucifixion was a common sight. According to Jewish law (Deut. 21:22-23) the offenders were “hung on a tree,” which meant they were “accursed of God.” Such criminals were removed from the cross before nightfall so that they would not “defile the land.”

Before a person in Jesus’ day was crucified, he was beaten with a whip. Often, pieces of metal or bone were attached to the ends of the whip, shredding the skin, and hastening death. After carrying his own crossbeam, he was nailed to it through the wrist. His feet were tied or nailed to the post.

The brutal murder of any great figure in history makes us ask: Why did it happen? Why was Julius Caesar assassinated? Who killed John F. Kennedy? What about Ghandi, or Martin Luther King? And, of course, the most important question of all, why did Jesus of Nazareth get crucified?

We have several different accounts of Jesus’ death, including references to it in non-Christian sources. The fullest and most familiar account, of course, is in the four New Testament gospels. By all accounts, it was the talk of the town at the time. Everyone would have known what had happened. We have no good reason to doubt that the sources give us good basic access to the history. But they press us back to the question: Why?

The first thing to remind ourselves is how crucifixion¹ functioned as a symbol of Roman rule² throughout the empire. It wasn’t just an extremely unpleasant and brutal way of killing someone. It also said, loud and clear, in public for all to see, that the Romans were in charge here, and anyone standing in their way got rubbed out. A cross on a hilltop was a powerful political statement.

Our task is to get inside the powerful symbols which Jesus chose to express his own intention, his calling to fulfill the will of God—a calling which led him by a very different route to what his contemporaries had expected. The old prophets had often clothed their message in symbolic action, and Jesus did the same.

The Charges: Pilate

Pilate comes across in historical record as cynical and unscrupulous. His general motivation seems to have been to snub the Jewish people and their rulers as often and as comprehensively as possible. Equally, any Roman provincial governor at that period, or indeed any other, must have been constantly aware that if he offended the Emperor back home, his days (not only of being a governor, but of staying alive) would be cut very short.

Pilate almost certainly knew that Jesus wasn’t guilty of leading a serious military revolt. He had had real revolutionaries up before him often enough, and knew what they were like and what sort of a following they had. Jesus was

clearly quite different. Equally, we have no reason to suppose that that would have stopped Pilate from going ahead with torture and judicial murder. Human life was cheap in the Roman empire.

What seems to have happened is that Pilate would have liked to let Jesus go, not out of any sense of justice or fairness, but simply because he could tell the chief priests wanted to have Jesus killed. And he wanted, as usual, to deny them what they wanted. They succeeded simply because they were able to suggest to Pilate what the Emperor would think if he heard Pilate had had a would-be Messiah, a rebel king, on a charge in front of him, and had let him go. Pilate knew when he was beaten. A token and cynical show of resistance, and the deed was done.³ He had done it many times before, and would do it many times again.

The Charges: Caiaphas

Things are slightly more complex with the hearing before Caiaphas. We saw in the previous program that the line of thought seems to have gone from Jesus' action in the Temple, to his implicit messianic claim, to the explicit statement Jesus made that he was the one whom God would vindicate. All this was quite enough to convince Caiaphas that Jesus was indeed a severe liability and that he should be got rid of. In fact, it handed to him, on a plate, the obvious charge to present before the Roman governor.

At the same time, throughout Jesus' whole ministry, he had been doing and saying things which had incensed many pious Jews. He had been implying that his agenda, his way of being faithful to Israel's true vocation, was the right one, even though it challenged the symbols by which Israel had ordered her national life. The Jewish leaders, real and self-appointed, had a way of describing someone like that: He was leading Israel astray, deceiving her. He was a false prophet. He was in league with Satan, with Beelzebub. Though these were not charges brought explicitly at Jesus' trial, they were swirling around him as he came to Jerusalem, and increased the authorities' determination to get rid of him.

Finally, what Jesus said at the interrogation made Caiaphas declare that he was a blasphemer. We will discover the reason for this in the next chapter. But Caiaphas had now heard enough for both the purposes he was anxious to accomplish. Jesus' claim to be Messiah was enough to hand him over to Pilate as a danger to the state. His blasphemy,

³ ELEMENTS OF ROMAN CRUCIFIXION:

1. Scourging or flogging: "[Pilate] had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified" (Mark 15:15 NIV).
2. Mock enthronement: "The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace...and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him" (Mark 15:16-19 NIV).
3. Bearing the crossbeam: "Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha)" (John 19:17 NIV).
4. A tablet listing the crimes hung around the victim's neck and then nailed above the cross: "Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: 'Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews,'... And the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek" (John 19:19-20 NIV).
4. Crucifixion
5. Legs sometimes broken to hasten death
6. The body would be left for days on the cross to rot and to be eaten by carrion birds.

⁴ **WHY DID JESUS DIE?** Jesus believed that the new kingdom, the new rule of God, would come, but not by simply rebuilding the temple in a bricks-and-mortar sense, nor by leading a military revolution to drive out the pagan Romans and establishing a free Jewish state. It was going to come through something he had to do himself, alone. He had to go to the very eye of the storm, to the place where evil was doing its worst, and offer himself, his own life, as the means of defeating that evil at last. He would exhaust that evil in himself. He had to embody, in himself, all that Passover, the freedom-celebration, had pointed towards. Jesus believed that Israel's whole destiny, to be the people of God for the world, to be God's way of saving the world, was reaching its climax; and that his life, and ultimately his death, were to be the means of bringing that about.

⁵ **PASSOVER:** The most important Hebrew feast, it commemorates the children of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage. "On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread,...it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb...." (See Mark 14:12)

⁶ **THE LORD'S SUPPER:** "...The disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?' He replied, 'Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, "the Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house."' So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover. When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, 'I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me.' They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, 'Surely not I, Lord?' Jesus replied, 'The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.' Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, 'surely not I, Rabbi?' Jesus answered, 'Yes, it is you.'

"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.' When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (Matt. 26:17-30 NIV).

as the culmination of his regular deceiving of the people, was enough to explain to the fickle crowds that Jesus had been found guilty of being a disloyal and dangerous Jew.

What Was Jesus Up To? ⁴

But what was in Jesus' own mind through all of this? To answer this, it isn't enough to start with a few sayings. We have to look, once again, at something Jesus did. In this case, we have to go to the Upper Room, to the last great celebration that he shared with his close followers.

The meal in question was a **Passover**⁵ meal. When Jews from very early times celebrated Passover, the meal itself was, as it remains to this day, a carefully crafted set of symbols, through which they remembered the great events of the Exodus, the time when God brought them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and home to the promised land. That was the time when God established His covenant with Israel, His binding promise to be their God. Actually, the meal did more than simply remind them of this. It wasn't a distant memory. It bonded them together with that first generation. They actually became "the people God led out of Egypt." They were reconstituted as the covenant people of YHWH.

When Jews of Jesus' day celebrated Passover, its message of freedom naturally resonated into their own context. What God had done to Egypt, He would do to Rome. What He had done for Israel then, He would do for her again. The meal which looked back to the Exodus also looked forward to the new Exodus, the renewal of the covenant, the end of exile, the forgiveness of Israel's sins. That's why Jerusalem was packed with Jewish pilgrims at Passover time. They flooded in from all over, eager to celebrate the coming redemption, the coming kingdom of God. That's why the Romans were on special alert over the holiday period. And that's why Jesus chose this moment to enact the great symbol that took this Jewish hope and declared: It is now being fulfilled, though not in the way Israel had expected.

[Dramatization of Lord's Supper from Luke]

Jesus took some of the regular features of the meal and gave them a **new significance**.⁶ This meal, he was saying, wasn't about Israel's political liberation from Rome. It pointed to his own imminent suffering and death as the clue to the real liberation, the real forgiveness of sins, the

real end of exile. Israel would be liberated, not just from suffering, but through suffering. And the suffering would be his own.

“This is my body, given for you; this is my blood of the new covenant, shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.” Jesus’ celebration of the meal thus seemed to say: Israel’s story is now at last reaching its climax; and Jesus’ own story, the short story of his extraordinary life and work, was also reaching its climax. He was the bearer of Israel’s destiny. He was the good shepherd who would give his life for the sheep.

As well as looking back to the Exodus itself, Jesus’ celebration of the meal, taken together with his entry into Jerusalem a few days earlier, carried echoes of a particular prophecy. “Here comes your king,” wrote Zechariah, “humble and riding on a donkey.” And, he went on, “because of the blood of the covenant, I will deliver your prisoners from their waterless pit.” Jesus was asking his followers to see him as the true king of Israel, the one whose own blood would seal the covenant between God and Israel, would save them from their real exile.

Riddles of the Cross

As with Jesus’ other symbols, once we grasp the central meaning we can see how some of his sayings fill in and explain the shocking meaning he was giving to the meal. Somehow, it seems, he saw his own approaching death as bound up with the fate of the nation as a whole. He had announced God’s judgment on Israel, for her failure to be the light of the world, to reflect God’s love to the nations. Now he would take that same judgment on himself.

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those sent to you! How often would I have gathered you, as a hen gathers her chicks⁷ under her wings, and you would not. Behold your house has been abandoned.”

The reason the hen gathers the chickens under her wings is most likely because of imminent danger. The hen is prepared, if necessary, to die by taking the danger upon herself to protect her brood. In the same way, Jesus sees the judgment coming on Jerusalem. His aim has been to take it upon himself to protect the nation. She has refused. Her insistence on going her own way means that the Temple is irrevocably under judgment. But the offer remains open to any individual Jews who want to trust themselves to him. His crucifixion is Israel’s crucifixion.

The same is true in another saying. “If they do this when

⁷ **THE HEN AND CHICKS:** “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’” (Matt. 23:37-39 NIV).

the wood is green, what will they do when it's dry?" Jesus, on the way to the cross, warns the women of Jerusalem that if the Romans are brutally executing him, despite the fact that he wasn't actually a revolutionary, then they can be expected to be even more brutal when Jerusalem is full of real revolution, when the children now playing in the streets grow up to be young firebrands, eager for violent revolt. Jesus is taking upon himself, in advance, the fate of the nation.

Deliverance Through Suffering

These sayings are dense and strange. If we are to understand all that Jesus meant, we have to take a step back again, into the thought-world of the Jews of his day.

Many of Jesus' contemporaries knew the stories of the great martyrs of recent times. In particular, they told of the appalling sufferings undergone by those who died at the hands of the Syrians, at the time of the Maccabean crisis, two hundred years earlier. In some of those stories, as they were being told in Jesus' day, the martyrs speak of a strange hope, that, somehow, their sufferings would draw the enemy fire, would act as a lightning rod for the wrath that was coming upon Israel, thus allowing the rest of the people to escape.

We find similar suggestions in the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran. The founder of the sect, the Teacher of Righteousness, had suffered greatly, and so had his followers. Somehow, these sufferings would be the gateway through which God would bring liberation.

Stories like these give a sharp focus to the whole idea of exile and restoration. They look back to a regular theme in the Jewish scriptures: That God would bring His people through suffering to vindication, and that this suffering would somehow be the means of redemption. The book of Daniel contains several such stories. The prophecy of Ezekiel speaks of the prophet "bearing the fate of Israel." Many of the Psalms,⁸ the great poems through which generation after generation of Jews expressed their faith, sang about the suffering through which God's people would pass to a new life. But, towering above these books, there stands the central section of the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah 40-55 is all about the coming end of exile, the forgiveness of sins, the return of YHWH to Zion. It describes how YHWH will defeat the evil empire that has enslaved His people, and the false gods who have challenged His supremacy. At the heart of this text is a sequence of poems

⁸ **THE PSALMS, SUFFERING AND VINDICATION:** The Psalms continued to be sung in the regular liturgical and praying life of Israel, not least in the Temple itself. Those going to Jerusalem would use the pilgrim psalms, and those worshipping at a festival, the festive ones. In that the Psalter was collected into its present form long after the Davidic monarchy had ceased to function as such, the regular focus on the promise to David and his heirs was a major way in which the hope for a renewed kingdom was kept alive. Psalms 1-41, 42-72 speak again and again of the suffering of the people of YHWH, and of their trust in him to vindicate and deliver them.

There is no reason why Jesus should not have carried Psalm 22 (and a good many others) in his head, and why he should not have prayed its first verse as he underwent the agony of crucifixion.

Psalm 22:1: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent" (NIV).

about Israel, the servant of YHWH. This servant is to be the one through whom Israel's vocation will at last be fulfilled. He will not only restore Israel. He will be the light of the world. But, as the picture develops, the servant undergoes terrible suffering. He seems to be sharing the worst that the Babylonian exile has done to the people of Israel. And then, as the picture reaches its climax, we discover that the suffering is actually the means by which the servant achieves his goal. "He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities."

Jews of Jesus' day had different interpretations of the servant poems. These poems seem to have influenced the picture of the suffering righteous people in the books of Daniel, and the so-called Wisdom of Solomon (a book written roughly contemporary with Jesus). Equally, one well-known rabbinic text sees the servant in Isaiah as the Messiah, but, interestingly, this Messiah does not actually suffer. It looks as though Jesus put together his own understanding of the prophetic texts in a new way, bringing together different strands of interpretation available in his culture. He would be the servant-Messiah. His suffering would be the way in which he would fulfill Israel's vocation,⁹ to be the light of the world.

The Great Battle

Throughout his public career, Jesus was cryptically telling the story of Israel. What's more, he was telling it in such a way as to suggest that it was at last coming to its great climax—in and through himself and his own work. Jesus wasn't just a talking head, spouting interesting ideas. He intended to accomplish something: to bring Israel's story to the goal which God intended. He saw himself as the focal point of Israel, the servant of the Lord. He would do and be for Israel what Israel had failed, under God, to do and be for herself.

We saw earlier that the task of Israel's Messiah would be to build or cleanse the Temple and to fight the real battle against Israel's enemies. Both of these agendas come into a strange new focus¹⁰ in the vocation of Jesus.

All through Jesus' ministry, he offered people the forgiveness which they would normally expect to receive from the Temple. He had then come to Jerusalem and, in a great prophetic symbolic action, predicted the Temple's destruction. His own action in the Upper Room, and the Last Supper, strongly implied that he was now offering to Israel and the world the reality to which the Temple had pointed,

⁹ THE THEMES OF JESUS' MINISTRY:

1. Jesus announces and enacts the kingdom of YHWH, doing and saying things which dovetail very closely with the message of Isaiah 40-55 as a whole.
2. The kingdom-program of Isaiah 40-55 as a whole is put into effect through the work of the servant, specifically his redemptive suffering.
3. Jesus acts symbolically as though he intends to put his kingdom-program into effect through his sharing of Israel's suffering and speaks as if that is indeed what he intends.
4. One of the relevant sayings quotes Isaiah 53 directly, and others can most easily be explained as an allusion to it.
5. It is therefore highly probably that, in addition to several other passages which informed his vocation, Jesus regarded Isaiah 53, in its whole literary and historical context, as determinative.
6. Jesus therefore intended not only to share Israel's sufferings, but to do so as the key action in the divinely appointed plan of redemption for Israel and the world.

¹⁰ **ISAIAH 53:** "Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows...he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth...he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken.... For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (selected verses—NIV).

but which it had so strikingly failed to embody.

In the same way, Jesus had spoken all along about a battle he had to fight. A battle, not with Rome, but with the real enemy threatening God's people. Behind Rome stood a dark power, which the Jews called the Satan, the accuser. Satan was not only to be found in the pagan hordes, out there beyond the borders of Israel, but in Israel herself, in her institutions, in her leadership, in—horror of horrors—the Temple itself. It was to be found, particularly in Israel's fatal compromise with pagan ideology: not, now, in the sort of compromise that involved secret idol worship, or obvious immorality, but the compromise by which Israel planned to be the true people of the creator God by becoming top nation in the pagan sense, beating the others in military conflict. Jesus saw that to fight the battle against paganism with paganism's weapons was already to lose the battle. You can't be the light of the world by killing everybody else.

Jesus' way forward, his way of fighting the real battle, was to be obedient to the agenda he discovered within the scriptural accounts of Israel's suffering and vindication. He discerned that Israel's great time of testing was upon her. The night would get darker and darker, and then the dawn would break. Her suffering would get more and more intense, and then deliverance would come. Evil would do its worst, and then would come the victory of God. Jesus believed it was his vocation to go to the point where the night was darkest, where the suffering was most intense, where evil reigned supreme, and to take its full force upon himself, in the belief that only so could it be defeated. Only so could the purposes of God, for Israel and hence for the whole world, be realized.

Jesus thus brought to a climax his work, throughout his ministry, of identifying with sinners in order to bring them God's salvation. He touched lepers and even corpses. He allowed people suffering from impurities to touch him. He celebrated meals with notorious sinners. Yet, at each point, instead of him contracting impurity, the diseased and the sinners found a new life, a new purity.

So it was on the cross. Jesus identified at last with the rebel movement, in order to save the rebels. Barabbas¹¹ is the obvious example. He was a holy brigand, a revolutionary who had committed murder during an armed insurrection in Jerusalem. Jesus quite literally took his

¹¹ **BARABBAS:** Barabbas was a murderer and insurrectionist being held in custody during the trial of Jesus. All four Gospels record that Pilate offered to release Jesus, but the crowd asked for the release of Barabbas instead. Barabbas was set free. Jesus literally took his place on the cross. "Now it was the governor's custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. At that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, 'Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?' for he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him.... But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. 'Which of the two do you want me to release to you?' asked the governor. 'Barabbas,' they answered.... Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged and handed him over to be crucified" (Matt. 27:15-18, 20-21, 26 NIV).

place. He identified with the two who were crucified alongside him. Again, they were brigands,¹² serious revolutionaries, not mere thieves. His table fellowship with sinners pointed the way to his strange dying fellowship with those who had been putting into practice what, to him, was the great evil of all: attempting to make human wrath and zeal the instruments of the victory of God.

Let's stand back and reflect on how this all works out. Jesus believed that Israel's history had arrived at its climax. More specifically, he believed that the exile had reached its climax. He believed that he was himself the bearer of Israel's destiny at this critical time. He was the Messiah who would take that destiny on himself and draw it to its focal point. He had announced the judgment of YHWH on his recalcitrant people. Now, as with the prophets of former days, they were planning to kill him. Jesus had declared that the way to the kingdom was the way of peace, the way of love, the way of the cross. This would be the means of Israel's becoming the light, not just of herself, but of the whole world. He would go as Israel's representative and take Israel's sufferings upon himself. As in so many of his own parables, he would tell Israel's well-known story one more time, with a radical and surprising twist in its tail. He would thereby fulfill Israel's vocation, to be the servant people, the light of the world.

Jesus therefore took up his own cross. He had come to see it, too, in deeply symbolic terms—symbolic, now, not merely of Roman oppression, but of the way of love and peace which he had commended so vigorously, the way of defeat which he had announced as the way of victory. The cross was to become the symbol of victory, but not of the victory of Caesar, nor of those who would oppose Caesar with Caesar's methods. It was to become the symbol, because it would be the means, of the victory of God.

¹² **JESUS AND THE TWO THIEVES:** "Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left....One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!' But the other criminal rebuked him. 'Don't you fear God,' he said, 'since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise'" (Luke 23:32-33, 39-43 NIV).

Questions for Review

1. Why did Jesus of Nazareth get crucified?
2. Describe the act of Roman crucifixion. What was it intended to say to all the people? How was “a cross on a hilltop” a powerful political statement?
3. Who was Pilate? Did he think Jesus was guilty of leading a serious military revolt? Why not? How was Jesus different from “real revolutionaries”?
4. Pilate would have liked to let Jesus go. Why didn't he?
5. What is meant by the Passover meal? What did this event represent? How did the Passover meal bond Jews together?
6. What did Jesus mean when he used the image of the hen and chickens?
7. Discuss the meaning of this statement: “If they do this when the wood is green, what will they do when it's dry?” What is Jesus saying?
8. Fill in the blank: “Behind Rome stood a dark power, which the Jews called the _____.”
9. Who was Barabbas? How did Jesus “quite literally take his place”?
10. Fill in the blanks: “Jesus had declared that the way to the kingdom was the way of _____, the way of _____, and the way of the _____.”
11. How does the cross become the “symbol of victory”?

For Deeper Examination and Study

PASSOVER

“The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt: ‘This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family.... The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect.... Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses.... That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire.... Do not leave any of it till morning.... This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord’s Passover. On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you.... This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance....” [selected verses] (Exodus 12:1-14 NIV; cf. Deuteronomy 16:1-8.)

Paul tells the Corinthians: “Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.” (1 Corinthians 5:7-8 NIV).

THE LAST SUPPER—A PASSOVER MEAL?

Surely, the meal was some kind of Passover meal. Several almost incidental details point this way. It was eaten at night in Jerusalem; Jesus and his followers normally returned to Bethany for the night, but Passover meals had to be eaten within the city limits after dark (days in the Jewish calendar began at sunset). The meal ended with a hymn, presumably the Hallel psalms sung at the end of the Passover meal (Psalms 115-118). The best explanation for Jesus’ crucial words is that the head of the household would normally explain certain parts of the Passover meal in relation to the exodus narrative. Passover would normally be celebrated by families.... Jesus regarded his followers as a fictive kinship group.

For Deeper Examination and Study

THE THREE MAJOR JEWISH FESTIVALS

The three major festivals were, of course, intimately connected with agriculture (**Passover**, with barley harvest; **Pentecost**, with wheat harvest and the bringing of first-fruits to the Temple; **Tabernacles**, with the grape harvest). They thus symbolically celebrated the blessing of Israel's God upon his Land and his people, and thereby drew together the two major covenantal themes of Temple and Land. In addition, Passover celebrated the exodus from Egypt; Pentecost, the giving of Torah on Sinai; Tabernacles, the wilderness wandering on the way to the promised land. All three, therefore, focused attention on key aspects of Israel's story, and in the retelling of that story encouraged the people once again to think of themselves as the Creator's free people, who would be redeemed by him and so vindicated in the eyes of the world. This theme was amplified in the prayers appointed for the different occasions.

The two extra festivals made substantially the same point, though without the agricultural connection. **Hanukkah**, commemorating the overthrow of Antiochus Epiphanes by Judas and his followers, underlined the vital importance of true monotheistic worship and the belief that when the tyrants raged against Israel her God would come to the rescue. **Purim**, celebrating the story found in the book of Esther, re-enacted the reversal of Haman's plot to destroy the Jews in the Persian empire; it drove home the same message.

Together the five feasts ensured that any Jew who made any attempt to join in—and by all accounts participation was widespread—would emerge with the basic worldview strengthened: one God, Israel as his people, the sacredness of the Land, the inviolability of Torah, and the certainty of redemption.

PILATE'S RULE IN JUDAEA

Pilate was not, by any account, a particularly competent or distinguished official. His rule in Judaea was often provocative and bullying. Philo's description of him...is worth quoting. He describes the incident in which Pilate placed golden shields in the Herodian palace, causing offense which was, for Philo, a foretaste of what would have happened had Gaius' plan to erect a statue of himself gone ahead. He tells how a delegation of princes confronted Pilate, threatening to tell Tiberius what was afoot. Pilate's reaction is revealing: "He feared that if they actually sent an embassy they would also expose the rest of his conduct as governor by stating in full the bribes, the insults, the robberies, the outrages and

For Deeper Examination and Study

wanton injustices, the executions without trial constantly repeated, the ceaseless and supremely grievous cruelty. So with all his vindictiveness and furious temper, he was in a difficult position. He had not the courage to take down what had been dedicated nor did he wish to do anything which would please his subjects. At the same time he knew full well the constant policy of Tiberius in these matters.”

PILATE’S WASHING OF HANDS

The famous scene of Pilate washing his hands must surely be read...as merely the high-point of his cynicism. He was the governor; he was responsible for Jesus’ death; washing his hands was an empty and contemptuous symbol, pretending that he could evade responsibility for something that lay completely within his power. What emerges from the records is not that Pilate wanted to rescue Jesus because he thought he was good, noble, holy or just, but that Pilate wanted to do the opposite of what the chief priests wanted him to do because he always wanted to do the opposite of what the chief priests wanted him to do. That was his regular and settled *modus operandi*.

WHY DID JESUS DIE?

1. Pilate recognized that Jesus was not the ordinary sort of revolutionary leader. If he was a would-be Messiah, he was a highly unusual one.
2. Pilate realized that the Jewish leaders had their own reasons for wanting Jesus executed and were using the charge of sedition as a convenient excuse.
3. Pilate took the opening to do what he would normally expect to do, which was to refuse their request; he tried this, but failed.
4. Pilate failed because it was pointed out to him in no uncertain terms that if he did not execute a would-be rebel king he would stand accused himself of disloyalty to Caesar.

Historically, emotionally, politically the sequence makes perfect sense. In terms of the Roman authorities, the answer to the question “why did Jesus die?” is that Pilate not only put cynical power-games before justice (that was normal), but also, on this occasion, put naked self-interest before both.

For Deeper Examination and Study

A CAPITAL CHARGE

In terms of the Jewish authorities, Jesus was sent to the Roman governor on a capital charge

- because many (not least many Pharisees, but also, probably, the chief priests) saw him as “a false prophet, leading Israel astray”;
- because as one aspect of this, they saw his Temple-action as a blow against the central symbol not only of national life but also of YHWH’s presence with his people;
- because though he was clearly not leading a real or organized military revolt, he saw himself as in some sense Messiah and could thus become a focus of serious revolutionary activity;
- because as the pragmatic focus of these three points, they saw him as a dangerous political nuisance, whose actions might well call down the wrath of Rome upon Temple and nation alike;
- because at the crucial moment in the hearing, he not only (as far as they were concerned) pleaded guilty to the above charges but also did so in such a way as to place himself, blasphemously, alongside the God of Israel.

The leaders of the Jewish people were thus able to present Jesus to Pilate as a seditious trouble-maker, to their Jewish contemporaries (and later generations of rabbinic Judaism) as a false prophet and a blasphemer, leading Israel astray, and to themselves as a dangerous political nuisance. On all counts, he had to die.

Questions for Deeper Discussion

1. "Human life was cheap in the Roman Empire." What examples throughout the history of the Roman Empire prove this statement to be true?
2. In what ways was Jesus' trial illegal? What were the roles of Caiaphas and Pilate?
3. How did the Jews of Jesus' day bring the meaning of Passover into their own context under Roman oppression? In what way did Rome represent Egypt? What is meant by the "new Exodus"? Why was Jerusalem "packed with Jewish pilgrims" at Passover time? Why did Jesus chose Passover to enact the great symbol of Jewish hope?
4. In what ways did Jesus give the regular features of the Passover meal a new significance?
5. Study Isaiah 40-55 and discuss its meaning. How did the people of Jesus' day interpret these scriptures? In what way would Jesus be the "servant-Messiah"? What would his suffering mean for Israel?
6. What did the Jews believe about Satan the accuser? About evil? About the "victory of God"?
7. List the three major Jewish festivals, and describe each.
8. What is symbolized by Pilate's washing of his hands? Why is it considered an "empty and contemptuous symbol"?
9. In terms of the Jewish authorities, why was Jesus sent to the Roman governor on a capital charge?

PROGRAM 5:

WHO WAS JESUS?

[Dramatization of Luke 22:63-71]

Whenever the subject of Jesus comes up, someone is bound to ask: “But was he divine?” Or “Do you think that Jesus was the Son of God?” This is the right question to ask. But, like a lot of right questions, it needs thinking through and putting, perhaps, in a different form.

When people use the word “divine,” they regularly have a picture of who God is. Often, they don’t realize that there are different possible meanings of the word “god,” and that we need to sort out what we might or should mean by it. In our culture, many people still think of “god” as an old-man-up-in-the-sky with a long beard and a stern expression. But that’s not the picture we get in the Bible. It’s not the picture Jesus and his contemporaries would have had.

If we start with the old-man-in-the-sky to say that Jesus is “the son of God” conjures up a picture of Jesus as a heavenly being, floating somewhere in mid-air. Certainly we do not think of a first-century Palestinian Jew walking the dusty streets, eating and drinking and all that goes with it, and dying a messy death. Despite the best efforts of theologians to explain what they really mean, when we use these words, “Son of God,” this is what most people still have in their minds.

The challenge for the early Christians, and now, their challenge to us, is to come at the whole question the other way around. Instead of assuming we know who God is, and then fitting Jesus into that, we ought to start with Jesus and work up to God from there. First, think of the real Jesus. Then ask what the word “god” might actually refer to. That’s the challenge we’re going to tackle now. To get at this question, we have to go back to the Jewish view of who the true God actually was.

The Coming of God

They believed that there was one God who had made the whole cosmos. They didn’t believe in the pagan gods and goddesses. Nor did they believe, as several non-Jews did, that the physical universe was a shabby, second-rate sort of thing, made by a second-rate god. They believed in one God,

who had made the whole wonderful world. But more than that, they believed this God had entered into a special relationship with Israel—beginning with Abraham, about 2,000 years before Jesus’ day. They called this relationship a “covenant,”¹ a sort of cross between a marriage, a contract, and a job description.

In this covenant, God promised to dwell with His people. He would live in the Temple in Jerusalem. He would be present to them when they read His law, the Torah. He would send His own wisdom to instruct and guide them. He would pour out His own Spirit, His own breath, on their special leaders. And He would speak His own Word to them. They would be His people indeed. He would be their God.

But Israel wandered away from their God. They failed to be wise, to heed His word. They grieved His Holy Spirit. They disobeyed His Torah. And instead of worshipping Him and Him alone, they worshipped other gods and goddesses. So He left them to their own devices to reap what they had sown. They went into exile away from the holy land. The Temple was destroyed. And YHWH Himself withdrew. He abandoned them. He disappeared.

But the great prophets of the exile, and afterwards, insisted that YHWH would return.² His glory would be revealed again for all to see. He would come suddenly to His Temple. He would restore His people’s fortunes, and live with them forever.

But at no time between the exile and the time of Jesus did anyone suppose that these promises had yet been fulfilled. They were still waiting for YHWH to return to Jerusalem to judge evil and to rescue His people. The question was, what might this look like when it happened?

Jesus’ Great Journey

When Jesus’ public career reached its height, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. He planned a last great pilgrim journey, to arrive at the holy city at Passover time.

The direct road from Galilee to Jerusalem, then as now, lay through hostile territory. The Samaritans were liable to attack pilgrim processions going to Jerusalem. So Jesus and his companions followed the line of the Jordan, going south as far as Jericho. Then they turned west and started the long climb through the Judean desert to the hills surrounding Jerusalem. The highest point on the climb is the Mount of Olives.

As they went, they sang. They sang the old pilgrim

¹ **WHAT IS A COVENANT?:** A covenant is a pact, agreement, or treaty between two parties. God made covenants with his people throughout the Old Testament. For example, God made a covenant with Noah (see Gen. 9:9-17), with Abraham (see Gen. 15:18; 17:2), with Israel (see Ex. 6:5-6; 19:4; 24:3-8; 23:32; 31:16), with David (see Isaiah 55:1-5), etc. The idea of covenant was central to Judaism.

² **ISAIAH 61:** “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.

“They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast.

“Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs.”

psalms. They sang about the rebuilding of the Temple. They sang about going to Zion to seek YHWH. They sang about YHWH's returning to Zion in glory and triumph. And particularly, they sang about the great coming kingdom of YHWH. They soaked themselves in the scriptures, which told the great story one more time: exile would end, evil would be defeated, YHWH Himself would return to His people.

When they got to the top of the Mount of Olives, Jesus arranged for a donkey on which to ride down into the Kidron Valley and up into the city. And as he got near Jerusalem, and his followers began to shout "Hosanna," he burst into tears.

[Dramatization of Luke 19:41-44]

"If only you had known—even you—at this time—the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come when your enemies will surround you, and leave not one stone upon another because you did not recognize the time when God was visiting you."

What did Jesus mean? Why did he say this? What had his journey to do with God's return to Zion? As Jesus arrived at the city, he told a riddle, a parable, which, in its teasing way, explained what he meant. His journey to Jerusalem wasn't just another pilgrim procession. It was another potent symbol. It was the symbolic enactment, the embodiment, even, of YHWH's return to Zion.

A Nobleman and His Slaves

Jesus' riddle was about a nobleman and his slaves. The nobleman goes off to a distant country to be made king, and in his absence gives his slaves money to trade with. When he comes back, he discovers that, though some of the slaves have made good use of the money, there is one who has simply hidden it, wrapped up safe, but useless, in a piece of cloth.

To a first century Jew, the code wouldn't be difficult to crack. The nobleman is God. The servants are Israel. In the long absence of their God, Israel had been given tasks to get on with. She was called to be the light of the world, the servant-people through whom he would be made known in all the world. But, though some Jews had been faithful, the majority had not. The weight of the parable falls on the wicked servant who failed in the commission. It will be as

the prophet said: “The Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to His Temple. But who may abide the day of His coming?” When YHWH returns to Zion, it will not be to underwrite all Israel’s own aspirations. It will be to judge as well as to save.

And Jesus tells this story, and other smaller ones like it, to indicate that his own journey to Jerusalem is intended to embody this strange coming, this return of YHWH to Zion. He tells it, in fact, to indicate that the kingdom of God is indeed at hand, but that it won’t happen in the way people imagine. What, he seems to be saying, will it look like when YHWH returns to Zion? Perhaps it will look like this: Not a pillar of cloud and fire, as it was at the time of the Exodus; not a blaze of military glory, sweeping all Israel’s enemies into the sea; but a young prophet on a donkey, in tears, riding into Jerusalem in fulfillment of prophecy, to enact and embody the coming of YHWH to judge and to save. No wonder the authorities were alarmed.

Sharing God’s Throne

The Jews were, and are, monotheists. That is, while the surrounding nations believed in many gods, the Jews believe in one, the creator God, who had entered into a special relationship with Israel. But that didn’t stop them from speculating about God’s acting in history through a special human agent. At the same time, some devout Jews attempted, through mystical practices, to attain the vision of the throne-chariot of God as seen by the prophet Ezekiel.

In the period around the time of Jesus, some Jewish men of prayer and thought seem to have brought together this first chapter of Ezekiel³ with Daniel 7,⁴ with its vision of “one like a son of man” being exalted to share the throne of the one true God.

One of the greatest of all rabbis, Akiba, who lived a century after Jesus, declared that Simeon ben-Kosiba was the Messiah. He also suggested that the Messiah would share the throne of God Himself. Such thoughts were perfectly thinkable for a Jewish monotheist of the period. Jesus seems to have developed a similar train of thought, and applied it to himself.

Jesus’ Language of Enthronement

He believed himself to be God’s Messiah, but in a new way. In a telling riddle, he enquired of his learned contemporaries how Psalm 110 could speak of the son of David as God’s right-hand man.⁵ His contemporaries couldn’t, or

³ **EZEKIEL’S VISION:** “I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was that of a man, but each of them had four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had the hands of a man. All four of them had faces and wings, and their wings touched one another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved.

“Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a man, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces...

“Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked like an expanse, sparkling like ice, and awesome. Under the expanse their wings were stretched out one toward the other, and each had two wings covering its body. When the creatures moved, I heard the sound of their wings, like the roar of rushing waters, like the voice of the Almighty, like the tumult of an army. When they stood still, they lowered their wings.

“Then there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him.

“This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking” (Ezekiel 1:4-28 NIV).

⁴ **DANIEL’S VISION:** “Daniel said: ‘In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea. The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a man, and the heart of a man was given to it. And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear.... After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule. After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast—terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns. While I was thinking

Continued on next page

⁴Continued

about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully. As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened....

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed" (Daniel 7:1-14 NIV).

⁵ **GOD'S RIGHT-HAND MAN:** Whose Son is the Christ?: "While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 'What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?'

"The son of David,' they replied.

"He said to them, 'How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him "Lord"? For he says, "The Lord said to my Lord: sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet."'

"If then David calls him "Lord," how can he be his son?' No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions" (Matt. 22:41-46 NIV).

wouldn't, answer him.

Then, speaking of his own coming suffering and vindication, Jesus used the image from Daniel 7, of "one like a son of man," who would be exalted to share the throne of the Ancient of Days. These two texts were used, in some first-century Jewish thought, to enquire what it meant that the Messiah would share the throne of God Himself.

The Jewish Hearing

Jesus brought these two key texts together at the climax of his hearing before the chief priest, Caiaphas. Caiaphas asked him why he'd spoken against the Temple, and Jesus didn't answer. Then he asked whether Jesus thought he was Messiah. Jesus replied with a combination of Psalm 110 and Daniel 7: "I am; and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

At one level, this was enough for Caiaphas to send Jesus to Pilate on a charge of being a would-be rebel king. But, at another level, it was enough for Caiaphas to declare that Jesus was guilty also in Jewish law, guilty indeed of blasphemy, the most serious offense possible. He had spoken of himself as the one who would share the very throne of God. This, indeed, was also Jesus' ultimate answer to Caiaphas' question about the Temple. From now on, the loyal people of God would seek and find their covenant God not in the Temple, but in and through Jesus himself.

What Does "God" Mean?

How can we begin to get a handle on what Jesus was talking about?

When we use the word "god," as we saw, we often refer to a high and dry god, far removed from everyday reality. This isn't the biblical view of God. What's more, if you start with that god, you may find that he gets so far away that you lose sight of him altogether. That's what's happened in Western culture over the last two centuries: God, the "absentee landlord" becomes simply God the "absentee." In the ancient world, the Epicureans believed in distant, remote deities.

There are, of course, lots of other meanings of "god." Non-Jewish religion regularly divinized what we call the forces of nature: thunder and lightning, the sun, the rivers, fire, the sea, and so forth. Some enterprising pagans, a century or three before Jesus, put all these together and made pantheism, the belief that the whole universe, everything, is divine.

In the contemporary world, too, we have what we call “forces,” both in the natural world and in, for instance, economics. Some people effectively regard these as divine, certainly as having the right to demand things, including sacrifices, from people. We also have neo-pagans, including pantheists (like some New Agers today) who regard the whole of creation not just as belonging to God, but as being divine in itself.

Jewish Belief

As we saw, Jewish belief was unlike all of this. The Jews believed in one God, who was, to be sure, holy and transcendent, greater than all we can see or think. Yet this God was present, in His word, in His spirit, in His wisdom, in His law, and, above all, in His temple. And He had promised to return to His people in person.

Jesus and the God of Israel

The fascinating thing to notice is that when Jesus spoke about his own activity, he plugged into these particular Jewish ways of speaking about God. The parable of the sower spoke of the word through which the seed would be sown, evoking the prophetic picture of God’s word at work in the world. When Jesus did mighty acts, he explained them in terms of God’s Spirit at work in a new way in Israel. His teachings echoed the call of wisdom to her hearers to abandon folly and find the true way to life.

Perhaps most strikingly, he spoke on his own authority, taking the Torah itself and declaring that, though it pointed in the right direction, it could not itself complete the job. When asked what was necessary to attain the age to come, he listed several of the Torah’s commandments. But just when he might have been expected to speak about putting God first, he told his questioner to give up everything and follow him, Jesus.

And, finally, when Jesus offered people forgiveness, he was offering them that which they would normally get only through the Temple itself. The strong and clear implication of his actions and words was that he had the right to do what, in Jewish theology, only the One who dwelt in the Temple—that is, Israel’s God Himself—could do. When he healed people, they didn’t have to go and offer sacrifices as well. The only exceptions are the lepers, who wouldn’t otherwise have been admitted back into their families and villages. He was, in short, a one-man counter-Temple movement. Jesus took the five ways in which Jews could speak

about the one God active within His world, within Israel, to judge and save, and he quietly appropriated them for his own use.

Jesus' Hidden Vocation

How then can we think or speak of Jesus himself, wrestling with the question of who he was and what he was called to do?

At this point, people often divide into two camps. Some devout Christians say that because Jesus was the son of God, the second person of the Trinity, he must have known he was God, must indeed have known everything, must have been walking around with a kind of total effortless superiority that sets him entirely apart from all other human beings. That, of course, isn't the picture we get in the gospels.

Equally, many others recognize that Jesus was a real human being, who lived a human life and died a human death. Some then find it impossible to think of him walking around simply and casually "knowing he was God." They are inclined to say that he never entertained such ideas; that, instead, it was the early church who first imagined that Jesus had been, all along, divine.

This great divide between those who think that Jesus is God and not human, and those who think he was human and not divine, is actually very misleading. What we find in the gospels is a far more Jewish picture. We find a young man, believing he was called to be a prophet, believing, too, that he was actually Israel's Messiah. We find him wrestling with questions, temptations, doubt, and fear. And we find him holding on through it all to an awareness of a vocation—a vocation to do and be what, in Israel's scriptures and tradition, only YHWH Himself does and is. This fully human being, this fully Jewish first-century Jesus, believed that in his actions and words, he was called to symbolize, to enact, and even to embody, the coming of Israel's God to Jerusalem, to His people, in judgment and mercy.

He seems to have come to this sense of vocation through his deep and prayerful study of Israel's scriptures. They told a story which he made his own. They offered a wisdom—a wisdom which was God's own self-expression—which he made his own. They held out a vocation, which he believed was his own God-given calling. Above all, they told of a God whose compassion was boundless; who looked after His people like a shepherd with his flock; who heard His people's cry and came to their rescue; who was

afflicted with their affliction, grieved at their distress. And Jesus believed it was his role, his job description, to act out what this loving, wise God said He would do. He would be the pillar of cloud and fire, leading God's people out of their long exile at last. He would embody in himself the returning and redeeming action of the covenant God.

Early Christians' View of Jesus

So we shouldn't be surprised that the very first Christians, who were all good Jewish monotheists, found themselves talking of Jesus in language they had hitherto used only for the one God. This didn't mean they were being disloyal to Judaism, or smuggling in ideas from the surrounding Gentile world. It meant that, confronted with the fact of Jesus, they were forced to understand, in a new and larger way, what precisely they meant by this one Jewish God in the first place.

It is Paul, writing as often as not from prison, who explains what early Christians thought⁶ about Jesus. To go into his letters in detail would take us too far afield just now. But we may note that, in writings dated within twenty-five years of Jesus' death, he is already speaking of Jesus in language drawn from the biblical picture of how the one God is active to be with and to redeem His people and the world.

But this is to run slightly ahead. Even if we grant that the historical picture drawn so far is correct, we still face the huge question: Why did anyone take the thoughts, words, and actions of Jesus seriously for one second after his humiliating and shameful death? It's failed Messiahs who end up on crosses. Any first-century Jew would know that a crucified Messiah was a contradiction in terms. However challenging Jesus' teaching may have been—however noble his aims, however loving his actions, however deep his sense of vocation—if he ended up getting crucified, they were bound to think, he must have been mistaken. He must have been completely deluded.

What changed their minds and, in so doing, launched the early Christian movement was Jesus' resurrection.⁷ That's what we'll be looking at in the final chapter.

⁶ **PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11:** "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (NIV).

COLOSSIANS 1:15-20: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (NIV).

⁷ **THE EMPTY TOMB:** Jesus was buried in a new tomb (belonging to Joseph of Arimathea) that had been hewn out in the rock. It was sealed with a large stone.

Early Christians said: Three days after Jesus' execution and burial, he was raised to bodily life again, leaving an empty tomb behind him. They knew as well as we do that things like that just don't happen. When people died they stayed dead, in first-century Palestine just as much as in the technological twentieth century. Jesus' followers weren't expecting him to die in the first place; when he did, they certainly weren't expecting him to rise again. Yet they said, loud and clear, that that was what had happened.

Questions for Review

1. Define the word “divine.”
2. What did the Jews of Jesus’ time believe about God?
3. How did the Jews see their “covenant” with God?
4. In what ways did Israel wander away from God?
5. Discuss Jesus’ “riddle” about a nobleman and his slaves. How would a first century Jew interpret it?
6. What is meant by “monotheism”?
7. Why did Jesus reply to Caiaphas with a combination of Psalm 110 and Daniel 7?
8. How was Jesus a “one-man counter-Temple movement”?
9. What was the early Christian’s view of Jesus?

For Deeper Examination and Study

COVENANTS

Israel's belief in one God, was held in close conjunction with her belief that she was, in a unique sense, the people of this God. The idea of covenant was central to Judaism. Covenantal ideas were totally common and regular at this time. The basis of the covenant was, of course, the set of promises to the patriarchs (set out particularly in Genesis 12, 15, 17, 22, etc.), chief among which was "blessing," whose overtones concerned especially the Land and its prosperity. The compilers of the Pentateuch saw the initial fulfillment of the covenant in the events of the exodus (Ex. 2:24), and thus understood the Torah as the covenant document which, grounded upon the faithfulness of Israel's God, provided for his people the way of life by which they should express their answering fidelity to him.

The book of Deuteronomy is the major work of covenant theology which stands at the head of a long line of subsequent writings on this theme. The emphases throughout are on the promises made to Abraham, blessing as the consequence of covenant fidelity, the land as the gift of Israel's God to his people, and Israel as holding the place of honor among the nation. For instance: "Look down from your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless your people Israel and the ground that you have given us, as you swore to our ancestors—a land flowing with milk and honey....Today you have obtained YHWH's agreement: to be your God; and for you to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, his commandments, and his ordinances, and to obey him. Today YHWH has obtained your agreement: to be his treasured people, as he promised you, and to keep his commandments; for him to set you high above all nations that he has made; in praise and in fame and in honor; and for you to be a people holy to YHWH your God, as he promised" (Dt. 26:15, 17-19).

Deuteronomy closes with two dramatic sections: the establishing of the covenant (chapters 27-30) and the farewell words of Moses (chapters 31-4). The first of these enumerates in detail the blessings and curses which attend the covenant—the blessings which will follow obedience and the curses which will follow disobedience. Significantly, these chapters envisage the curse not just as a possibility but as a certainty. Moses, within this text, knows that Israel is going to turn away from YHWH and provides for this contingency: the ultimate curse will be exile (quite logically, since the promised land is the place of blessing), but after exile will come covenant renewal, the circumcision of the heart, the return to the Land, the perfect keeping of Torah. Although we are not well informed about how widely read such passages were in the first century, we can say with confidence that the collocation of ideas, sometimes no doubt

For Deeper Examination and Study

mediated through other writings both canonical (e.g. Jeremiah) and non-canonical (the Scrolls) were in wide currency.

Covenantal ideas were therefore fundamental to the different movements and currents of thought within second-temple Judaism. The Maccabean crisis was all about the covenant. The setting up of Essene communities took place in the belief that Israel's God had renewed his covenant at last (but secretly, with them alone). The book of Jubilees celebrated the special status of Israel in virtue of the covenant. The later wisdom literature stressed the Jewish covenant if anything more strongly than the biblical wisdom tradition had done. The apocalyptic writings looked in eager expectation for their God to fulfill his covenant and thus to vindicate Israel. The later rabbis examined ever more carefully the obligations through which Israel was to act out her part in the divine covenant. It was the covenant which meant that Israel's oppression was seen as a theological as well as a practical problem, and which determined the shape which solutions to that problem would have to take. It was the covenant that drove some to "zeal" for Torah, others to military action, others to monastic-style piety. The covenant raised, and helped to answer, the question as to who really belonged to Israel. Covenant theology was the air breathed by the Judaism of this period. This complex of covenantal ideas gave Israel a particular understanding of who precisely she was as a people within the purposes of the creator God.

WHEN AND HOW WOULD ISRAEL'S GOD ACT TO FULFILL HIS COVENANT PROMISES?

- Israel's God was indeed going to fulfil the covenant. The hope is never abandoned.
- This will result in re-establishing the divinely extended order in all the world.
- Israel's present plight is to be explained, within the terms of the divine covenant faithfulness, as his punishment for her sin.
- The explanation for the apparent inactivity of the covenant God at the present moment is that he is delaying in order to give time for more people to repent; if he were to act now, not only the sons of darkness but a good number of the sons of light would be destroyed in the process. As a result of this process of delay, those who do not repent will be "hardened" so that, when the time comes, their punishment will be seen to be just.
- The obligation on the covenant people was therefore to be patient and faithful, to keep the covenant with all their might, trusting him to act soon to vindicate them at last.

For Deeper Examination and Study

THE EARLY CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW REGARDING GOD'S COVENANT:

1. Who are we?

We are a new group, a new movement, and yet not new, because we claim to be the true people of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the creator of the world. We are the people for whom the creator God was preparing the way through his dealings with Israel. To that extent, we are like Israel; we are emphatically monotheists, not pagan polytheists, marked out from the pagan world by our adherence to the traditions of Israel, and yet distinguished from the Jewish world in virtue of the crucified Jesus and the divine Spirit, and by our fellowship in which the traditional Jewish and pagan boundary-markers are transcended.

2. Where are we?

We are living in the world that was made by the God we worship, the world that does not yet acknowledge this true and only God. We are thus surrounded by neighbors who worship idols that are, at best, parodies of the truth, and who thus catch glimpses of reality but continually distort it. Humans in general remain in bondage to their own gods, who drag them into a variety of degrading and dehumanizing behavior-patterns. As a result, we are persecuted because we remind the present power-structures of what they dimly know, that there is a different way to be human, and that in the message of the true God concerning his son, Jesus, notice has been served on them that their own claim to absolute power is called into question.

3. What is wrong?

The powers of paganism still rule the world and from time to time even find their way into the church. Persecutions arise from outside, heresies and schisms from within. These evils can sometimes be attributed to supernatural agency, whether "Satan" or various demons. Even within the individual Christian there remain forces at work that need to be subdued, lusts which need to be put to death, party-spirit which needs to learn humility.

4. What is the solution?

Israel's hope has been realized; the true God has acted decisively to defeat the pagan gods, and to create a new people, through whom he is to rescue the world from evil. This he has done through the true King, Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, in particular through his death and resurrection. The process of implementing this victory, by means of the same God continuing to act through his own spirit in his people, is not yet complete. One day the King will return to judge the world and to set up a kingdom which is on a different level from the kingdoms of the present world order. When this happens more who have died as Christians will be raised to a new physical life. The present powers will be forced to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, and justice and peace will triumph at last.

Questions for Deeper Discussion

1. Discuss religious pluralism in the Roman Empire. Who were their gods and goddesses, and how did they worship them?
2. Examine the first chapter of Ezekiel with Daniel 7 and discuss.
3. Describe Jesus' "language of enthronement."
4. What are the beliefs of a pantheist? Of a New Ager?
5. Did Jesus know he was God? How would people today answer that question? How can Jesus be both God and human at the same time? Consider these statements made by Dr. Wright: "When people ask the question, 'Is Jesus God?', they tend to assume that we know who God is; the question means, Can you fit Jesus into your God-picture? Well, the best Christian answer has always been: we don't know, off the top of our heads, exactly who God is; but we can discover him by looking at Jesus."
Consider these statements also: "When somebody asks me, 'Was Jesus God?' I usually turn the question around. 'Is it true that the living God was uniquely and personally present in Jesus?'"
6. How did Jesus himself come to "this sense of vocation"?
7. Using Paul's letters, examine how Paul explains what early Christians thought about Jesus.
8. Ponder the following statement: "Why did anyone take the thoughts, words, and actions of Jesus seriously for one second after his humiliating and shameful death?" How is "a crucified Messiah" a contradiction in terms?
9. When and how would Israel's God act to fulfill his covenant promises?
10. What was the early Christian worldview regarding God's covenant?

PROGRAM 6:

THE NEW CLAIM

[Dramatization of Luke 24:1-12, 36-48]

The early Christians declared that Jesus of Nazareth had been bodily raised from the dead. If they hadn't believed this, then there simply wouldn't have been any early Christians at all. People whose Messiah got crucified usually slunk home with their tails between their legs, if indeed, they got away at all.

One hears it said, often enough, that people could believe in the resurrection then because, being pre-modern persons, they didn't know the laws of science. This is naive. Everybody in the ancient world, as well as everybody in the modern, knew that when people die they don't bounce back to life again. You don't need a Ph.D. in nuclear physics to get that straight.

So what happened? The key question to ask is: What did the language of resurrection mean to the people who used it? They were all first-century Jews. What did that language mean in their world.

Meaning of "Resurrection" for Jews in Jesus' Day

For much of the Jewish scriptures, there is only a shadowy idea of an existence after death. The first major statement about resurrection is a sort of parable. Ezekiel,¹ seeing that the exile was God's punishment on Israel's sins, likens exile itself to a sort of death, so that return from exile becomes sort of raising from the dead. The idea of resurrection thus starts off life as a metaphor for the great return, the restoration.

But when the Jews did come back from exile they found that the real restoration still hadn't happened. Other nations oppressed them, sometimes fiercely. In the Maccabean crisis, two hundred years before Jesus, the Syrian king tortured and killed several Jews who refused to obey what seemed to them blasphemous decrees. As they went to their deaths, they insisted that God would vindicate them afterwards by giving them new bodies.

This belief, that the righteous dead were safe in God's keeping and would rise again when God finally restored the fortunes of His people, became quite commonplace in Judaism. And this hope was never divorced from politics. It was never merely a matter of speculation about what hap-

EZEKIEL AND THE VALLEY OF DRY

BONES: "The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' I said, 'O Sovereign Lord, you alone know.'

"Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones and say to them, "Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord...."'

"Then he said to me: 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off." Therefore prophecy and say to them: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord'"' (Ezekiel 37:1-14 NIV).

² **SADDUCEES:** The Sadducees (or “righteous ones”) were a religious group that formed during the period between the Testaments when the Maccabees ruled Judah. They were the rich aristocrats of the time. They claimed to be descendants of Zadok, the high priest in Solomon’s time. They accepted the first five books of the Old Testament (Pentateuch) as their ultimate authority. They didn’t believe in life after death, nor in angels or demons. They strongly opposed Jesus. They wanted nothing and no one to threaten their position and wealth. The Sadducees stand out as unusual in that they will have nothing to do with a future life, neither with immortality nor with resurrection.

³ **RESURRECTION:** What was it that made Jesus’ desperately disappointed followers conclude that his crucifixion was a victory, not a defeat? What was it that made them say that this wasn’t just a brutal and messy murder, but the decisive loving and saving act of the living God? Because of what happened next. God raised him from the dead. They weren’t expecting it...but it happened. And bit by bit, we came to see that what happened here on that Friday afternoon was the drawing together of all those other Jerusalem-stories. This was how the kingdom was to come. This was how the prophecies would be fulfilled. This was what the temple was always pointing to. This was like Abraham sacrificing Isaac, only now it was the living God sacrificing his own beloved son. This was the place where the pain and the sin and the shame and the guilt of all the world, of all people, of all history, was concentrated—and was dealt with once and for all. This was where the one true God acted to save and heal the whole world. That’s what Jesus’ followers found themselves driven to say.

⁴ **THE FIRST EASTER:** “On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: “The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.”’ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened” (Luke 24:1-12 NIV).

pened to people after they die. It was always to do with God’s overturning of the present world order and establishing His people in freedom and peace.

For this reason, we shouldn’t be surprised to find that the aristocrats opposed ideas like this. Normally, the aristocracy in ancient societies made sure they were looked after well in the next world, as they had been in this. But the Jewish aristocracy, the Sadducees,² denied any future life. It was politically dangerous to encourage such speculations. They left it to the radical pressure groups like the Pharisees.

In between the Pharisees and Sadducees, several Jews believed in life after death in a non-bodily sense. Several texts speak in this way, which conforms more to the prevailing Greek culture of the ancient world.

So there was a wide spectrum of Jewish belief about life after death. But if someone said “resurrection” they didn’t just mean “life after death.” They were referring to the belief that, when God finally acted, all the dead (or at least all the righteous dead) would rise again to share the new world that God was making.

So why did the Christians say “resurrection” had happened? They said it because they believed that Jesus himself had been raised from the dead.³

The Skeptics’ Reply: The Women Made It Up

Skepticism set in very early on within the first minutes of the first Easter day,⁴ in fact. The disciples, those great early Christian leaders, started off as the first skeptics. The women who went to the tomb came back and said that they’d found it empty. The disciples refused to believe them.

Once the disciples had been convinced, and once word had spread around Jerusalem that something odd had happened, the authorities were quick to reinforce natural skepticism with an official explanation: The disciples must have stolen the body. This is exactly the sort of damage control we should expect from authorities, ancient or modern.

A different sort of skepticism was held by people like Saul of Tarsus, representing the extreme wing of the Pharisees. He believed in resurrection. He believed in it passionately as part of the package of beliefs about how Israel’s God would defeat evil and bring in His new world. But he didn’t believe — he couldn’t believe — that God would raise the crucified Jesus of Nazareth from the dead. If God had done so, Saul’s entire world would be turned upside down and inside out.

Pagan Rejection

That, of course, is exactly what happened. It was then Saul's turn to confront skepticism of the predictable intellectual type. He was mocked by the highbrow Athenians, who knew that dead people didn't live again, and could only assume that this was the sort of babbling nonsense you might expect from a wandering Jewish philosopher.

Modern skeptics have attempted to deny all occurrences of divine power strikingly at work in history. They still have to account, of course, for the rise of early Christianity. All sorts of unlikely theories about this have been regularly produced.

- Hallucination

It was a corporate hallucination, we are told. Well, they knew about hallucinations in the ancient world, too. A quick check at the tomb would have settled this one way or another.

- Wrong Tomb

Others say they went to the wrong tomb. Well, someone must have known where the right tomb was. Anyway, the stories don't just say that they found an empty tomb. They say that they found an alive Jesus.

- He Didn't Die

Jesus wasn't really dead, say some. It takes some believing to suppose that the Roman guards, who were well practiced in killing people, would have let Jesus go half-dead. It also takes some believing to imagine that a half-dead Jesus, revived in the tomb, staggering out a few days later, presumably to be hidden for a while and then to die properly in due course, would have encouraged his frightened followers to stand boldly in Jerusalem and declare that the resurrection had occurred.

- Fantasy

They experienced a fantasy, induced by their great grief, say some. After all, people still today experience the presence of someone they love after they've died. Yes, but they don't say they've been raised from the dead. First-century Jews knew about grief-induced fantasies, too. They had language for such things: They spoke of being visited by a person's "angel" or "spirit." The stories about the risen Jesus are not stories about an angel or a spirit.

Others say that the disciples experienced a new sense of the forgiving love of God, meeting them after their guilt at having run away. That theory, in one form or another, makes regular appearances. Well, the disciples certainly did experience the forgiving love of God. But, again, Jews had language for talking about God's forgiving love. And that

language didn't include saying that someone was raised from the dead.

- **Wishful Thinking**

A few scholars suggest that some of Jesus' followers read in their scriptures that there was to be a resurrection, so after quite a while they suggested that these scriptures had come true. Well, lots of other people had read those same texts. Indeed, they had pondered them, and prayed over them, and had longed for them to come true. But nobody ever said they had come true, in any of the other movements we read about in Josephus and elsewhere.

The main problem with all of these skeptical solutions can be stated quite easily. We know of at least a dozen other messianic or quasi-messianic movements within a hundred years either side of Jesus. In all probability, there were lots of others that didn't make it into the history books.

Routinely these movements ended, with the execution of their would-be messiah. Faced with this, their followers had the choice: Either disperse as quickly as you can, or find yourself another leader. If we try for a moment to imagine someone five minutes, five weeks, or five years after the death of Simon bar-Giora or Simeon ben Kosiba trying to say that Simon or Simeon really was the messiah after all, still less that he had "loved them and given himself for them," we see at once that it is absurd. Such a person either ran away, or got another leader. If Jesus of Nazareth wasn't raised from the dead, we can confidently say that his followers would have done one of these two things.

But they didn't. They look, to start with, as if they would go the first route. Back to beloved and beautiful Galilee, back to their jobs. Forget the whole thing. Then, when they found themselves (to their own astonishment) getting going again, the remarkable thing is that, though they had one or two well-known leaders, nobody ever supposed for a minute that one of them was the Messiah. In particular, James,⁵ the brother of Jesus, was the great leader at the center of early Christianity in Jerusalem. But nobody ever dreamed of saying that James was now the Messiah. Nothing would have been more natural. But, no. Jesus was the only Messiah the movement ever had. But a crucified person can't be a Messiah. Crucifixion proves he was mistaken. Unless, that is, he really was raised from the dead.

⁵ **JAMES, BROTHER OF JESUS:** James was "the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:19). This may mean literal brother, stepbrother, cousin, friend, or associate. Paul mentions a resurrection appearance by Jesus to James in 1 Cor. 15:7. After the resurrection, James became the leader of Peter's Jerusalem church. James died about A.D. 66, reportedly at the order of Ananus, the high priest.

The Transformed Body of Jesus

So what did they think had actually happened to Jesus? The earliest and best evidence we have for thinking this

whole question through comes from Paul.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, he insists that Jesus really was bodily raised from the dead. That, therefore, the resurrection, the great end time reversal of cosmic decay, of sin and death themselves, has actually already begun. That therefore we can look forward to the dawning of the new day when the victory will be complete, when all God's people will be raised as Jesus had been raised. That the new body will be both similar to the present one and different from it in significant ways; and that therefore the resurrection of the body means neither the abandonment nor the resuscitation of the body, but its transformation.

When we turn from Paul to the accounts in the gospels, we find that they all agree with the central point that Paul is making. They do it in a very different way from him, of course, and there are quite significant differences of emphasis among them. What they all agree on is this: what happened on Easter Day didn't mean that Jesus' body was left to rot in the tomb. It didn't mean that Jesus simply came back into the same sort of life that he had had before. His body was transformed,⁶ so that it was basically the same body, leaving an empty tomb behind it, but changed so that it now had new properties. It could come and go through locked doors, though it could also consume food.

How are we to explain the rise of stories like these both in Paul and in the gospels? It won't do to suggest that, as Christianity moved out into the wider world, it acquired funny ideas from extraneous sources. Belief in resurrection is about as Jewish as you can get. But, at the same time, the Jewish belief in resurrection wasn't about one person being raised to new life in the midst of ongoing world history. It was about all the righteous dead (and perhaps all the unrighteous dead too) being raised to life at the end of the present age at the time when God would make all things new.

We appear to be faced with a belief which only makes sense, if it is to make any sense at all, completely within the Jewish worldview, and which, nevertheless, challenges the Jewish sense of how history was going to reach its great climax. If, as historians, we want to account for the rise of this belief within earliest Christianity, we either have to invent a new theory, which will do better than all the skepticism of the last two thousand years, or we will be wise at least to consider that the disciples were telling the truth. Jesus of Nazareth really was raised from the dead, with his body being neither abandoned nor resuscitated, but transformed.

⁶ THE CHARACTERISTICS OF JESUS' NEW BODY:

- Jesus' new body could pass through locked doors: "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!'" (John 20:19 NIV).
- Jesus' disciples could touch Jesus in his new body: "A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them....Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side....'" (John 20:26-27 NIV).
- Jesus' disciples recognized him, and Jesus could eat with his disciples: "Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' None of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.... When they had finished eating...." (John 21:12, 13, 15 NIV).

⁷ **FROM ROMANS 8:** “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently....

“What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

What the Resurrection means

But what would the significance be of Jesus of Nazareth’s being raised from the dead? I once heard a scholar suggest that it would be trivial and irrelevant. It would be nice for Jesus, he said, but what would be in it for the rest of us?

This totally fails to address the way in which a biblically aware Jew of Jesus’ day would have understood the entire sequence of events. As we see in Paul, the meaning of Jesus’ resurrection wasn’t just about something that had happened to Jesus. Nor was it just about something that could happen to other people in their present spiritual lives or in their future hope for life after death (though it was all of these as well).

It was, first and foremost, the signal that the great new day had indeed dawned, even though it didn’t look like what Jews had been expecting. The resurrection of Jesus was both the beginning and the guarantee⁷ of the whole new creation that the prophets had promised and that had now begun to appear. This meant that the world, whether it knew it or not, had already entered the new age. Jesus was already Lord of the world. The church’s job was to live under his lordship, and to announce that lordship to the rest of the world.

The other meanings of the resurrection all fan out from this point. New life for the individual. New life for divided communities. New hope for the future. New behavior-patterns and possibilities in the present. All this comes about, in the early church, because Jesus was raised from the dead.

In particular, there was a new clarity about hope. The early Christians did not believe that their final destiny was a disembodied “heaven.” That, if anything, was where they would be between their death and God’s creation of the new heavens and new earth. They believed, of course, that when God’s people died they would go to be with God, or (as Paul says) with Christ. But on the last day, when the new heavens and the new earth would come into existence, they would all be raised to new embodied life to share in the new world that God was in the process of making.

So What?

If anyone is puzzled by this whole sequence of events and wants to come to terms with what it all means for them today, where can they start?

Perhaps the most important thing to notice is that, from the very beginning, those who asserted most clearly that Jesus had been raised, that the world had been renewed, that they themselves had found new life in and through Jesus, were also most clear that this didn’t mean an easy, triumphant

Christian world in which all problems had been solved and one could gently coast along towards the coming new day.

On the contrary. Paul writes about Jesus' defeating the principalities and powers of this world on the cross. And he is in prison as he writes, kept at the pleasure of one of those arrogant principalities and powers that doesn't seem to have noticed yet that its time is actually up. He writes about the new life that Christians have as one body in Christ. Yet this letter is addressed to a church that is deeply and bitterly divided. He writes that he is a new creation in Christ. Yet he says this in a letter where he also describes himself as going through severe emotional distress.⁸ Somehow, Paul is able to affirm, at the same time, that the new world has indeed broken into the old, and that the old is still powerful and painful.

This is the clue to the obvious question: If Jesus really did win the decisive victory over the powers of evil, when he died on the cross and rose again from the dead, why hasn't evil been fully defeated? Why do we still have wars and rumors of wars? Why is there crime, cheating, murder, adultery? Why are there Holocausts?

The answer, from the Christian point of view, cannot be that nothing has actually changed, that Jesus of Nazareth merely gave people the option of a new sort of spirituality, or that there are socially and politically subversive ways of living to which he points, but which most of his followers have singularly failed to live by ever since.

Nor will it do simply to answer that the present world is no doubt very wicked, but Jesus enables us to leave this world behind and to escape to a remote, detached world called "heaven" after we die.

Nor does it help, finally, to suggest that though God will indeed implement the victory of Christ over the powers, this won't happen at all just now, but will all occur in a flash when Jesus Christ comes again at the last to judge the living and the dead.

What to Live By

Somehow we have to live by a powerful combination of beliefs that often seem in tension with each other.

- First, we have to live by faith in Jesus' achievement. It won't do to say that Jesus didn't really achieve anything. If he rose from the dead, we are faced with a new world order, whether we like it or not.
- Second, we have to live by hope in the final implementation of Jesus' achievement. That which he achieved climactically in his death and resurrection will be implemented

⁸ PAUL DESPAIRS OF LIFE: "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers...." (2 Cor. 1:8-11 NIV).

⁹ **THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT:** “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34 NIV).

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other” (John 15:13-14, 16-17 NIV).

fully and finally in the defeat of death, and the wiping away of all tears from all eyes.

- Third, we have to live by love⁹ in the present. The church is summoned to the task of being for the world what Jesus was for Israel—the embodiment, symbolic and actual, of the living and loving presence of the living and loving God.

Because of what Jesus has done and because the church is now equipped with Jesus’ own Spirit, the church’s mission—the mission of every believer—is not to snatch people out of the world, but to go into the world to announce the Lordship of Jesus. This means to transform individuals, communities, societies, and creation itself with the love of God.

When the church even begins to do this, no matter how muddled and fitful such work may be, then it will awaken human beings to the truth of what it really means to be human. Jesus called Israel to be Israel indeed. The church must call humans to be human indeed, to love one another, to care for God’s creation, and above all, to worship the God in whose image they are made, and thus to follow Jesus.

As the church goes about this work, it will discover that the road it treads has a familiar signpost. If we are to be faithful to the calling of the Lord, we must tread the way of the cross, which means going to the places where the world is in pain, to embody the healing and loving presence of God at precisely those places. There’s no point embodying the love of God in a cozy huddle, away from where that love is really needed.

But the church, in offering the world this Jesus-shaped love, lives by the belief and hope that with the cross there is resurrection. It isn’t simply a matter of putting up with a mess in this life, and hoping for better things in the next. We are commissioned to create beauty out of ugliness, to bring order out of chaos, to bring hope out of despair, to bring peace out of violence, to bring love where there is hatred. We will only partially succeed in any of these tasks. But when we do, and even when we don’t, there will be hidden light, reflected glory, shining both on us and through us. The church from very early on learnt to recognize that glory as the glory of the Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus alive and at work in the world through the work of his people, the church. But that’s another subject, for another day.

Questions for Review

1. Ponder the following statement: "The early Christians declared that Jesus of Nazareth had been bodily raised from the dead. If they hadn't believed this, then there simply wouldn't have been any early Christians at all." Why is this statement true?
2. What did the people of Jesus' day believe about death and resurrection?
3. What did the Sadducees believe about a future life? What did the Pharisees believe?
4. Who were the first skeptics? Why did the disciples refuse to believe the women who told them the tomb was empty?
5. What official explanation did the authorities offer about Jesus' missing body?
6. Discuss each of the following theories:
 - hallucination
 - wrong tomb
 - he didn't die
 - fantasy
 - religious experience
 - wishful thinking
7. If Jesus had not risen from the dead, what two things would his followers have done?
8. What does Paul believe about Jesus' resurrection?
9. Describe Jesus' new body. How was it different from his "old" body?
10. What did Jesus' resurrection say to the Jews about "hope"? About "heaven"?
11. What is the mission of each church and each believer?
12. What is meant by "Jesus-shaped love"?

For Deeper Examination and Study

WHY DID BELIEF IN THE RESURRECTION ARISE?

Again and again we have seen that this belief is bound up with the struggle to maintain obedience to Israel's ancestral laws in the face of persecution. Resurrection is the divine reward for martyrs; it is what will happen after the great tribulation. But it is not simply a special reward for those who have undergone special sufferings. Rather, the eschatological expectation of most Jews of this period was for a renewal, not an abandonment, of the present space-time order as a whole, and themselves within it. Since this was based on the justice and mercy of the creator God, the God of Israel, it was inconceivable that those who died in the struggle to bring the new world into being should be left out of the blessing when it eventually broke upon the nation and thence on the world. Resurrection would be, in one and the same moment, the reaffirmation of the covenant and the reaffirmation of creation. Israel would be restored within a restored cosmos: the world would see, at last, who had all along been the true people of the Creator God.

RESURRECTION STORIES

The stories the disciples told about Jesus' resurrection are mostly quite breathless and artless. They are mostly much more like quick eyewitness sketches, with the details not even tidied up, than like carefully drawn portraits. (See Mark 16; Matthew 28; Luke 24; John 20-21.)

An exception to this is the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). They were walking home, deeply sad and troubled, believing their leader to be dead and gone. They were joined by a stranger, who professed not to know what was going on. When they told him, he began to explain to them, working from the biblical texts they already knew, that this had been God's secret plan all along, to liberate Israel and the world, by means of the Messiah's suffering, dying, and rising again.

Their hearts (as they said later) burned within them as they began to realize the great possibility that after all his death might have been, so to speak, God's secret weapon—the last great move in the battle for the kingdom. God had been working in ways they never even dreamed of, even though they had been there all along in the scriptures.

When they got home, they invited the stranger in. He quietly assumed the role of host and broke the bread for their evening meal. They recognized him. It was Jesus himself. Then as strangely as he had come, he disappeared again.

For Deeper Examination and Study

(Note: In the following scripture passage, 1 Corinthians 15, choose three or four of the highlighted text to ponder and discuss:)

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

- NOT ABANDONMENT
- NOT RESUSCITATION
- BUT TRANSFORMATION

(In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul insists that Jesus really was bodily raised from the dead. That, therefore, the resurrection, the great end time reversal of cosmic decay, of sin and death themselves, has actually already begun. That, therefore, we can look forward to the dawning of the new day when the victory will be complete, when all God's people will be raised as Jesus had been raised. That the new body will be both similar to the present one and different from it in significant ways; and that, therefore, the resurrection of the body means neither the abandonment nor the resuscitation of the body, but its transformation.)

PAUL WRITES TO THE CORINTHIANS (1 COR. 15)

"Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that

For Deeper Examination and Study

he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he has put everything under his feet. Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I die every day—I mean that, brothers—just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.' Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character. Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame.

But someone may ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?' How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives his own body. All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

For Deeper Examination and Study

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through out Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

Questions for Deeper Discussion

1. What did the language of resurrection mean to the people who used it in Jesus' day?
2. How is Paul able to affirm that "the new world has indeed broken into the old, and that the old is still powerful and painful"?
3. Dr. Wright asks the question: "If Jesus really did win the decisive victory over the powers of evil when he died on the cross and rose again from the dead, why hasn't evil been fully defeated? Why do we still have wars and rumors of wars? Why is there crime, cheating, murder, adultery? Why are there Holocausts?" Discuss.
4. "Somehow," the author writes, "we have to live by a powerful combination of beliefs that often seem in tension with each other." List these beliefs and discuss each.
5. Describe how Jesus' resurrection brings:
 - new life for the individual
 - new life for divided communities
 - new hope for the future
 - new behavior patterns and possibilities in the present
6. What is meant by "disembodied heaven"? What did the early Christians believe about their "final destiny"? What is meant by "the new heavens" and "the new earth"?
7. Describe the church as "one body in Christ."
8. Ponder these three points regarding faith, hope, and love:
 - First, we have to live by faith in Jesus' achievement.
 - Second, we have to live by hope in the final implementation of Jesus' achievement.
 - Third, we have to live by love in the present.
9. Discuss the meaning of 1 Corinthians 15.

APPENDIX A: JEWISH RESISTANCE EVENTS AND MOVEMENTS

In this series Dr. Wright lays great emphasis upon the fact that there were many Jewish acts of defiance to Roman authority, resistance movements, and “would-be messiahs” during the time before, of, and after Jesus. These movements are sometimes briefly listed on the screen in programs 1, 3, and 6. However, we realize there is not time to read them carefully.

So, we supply here a composite listing of the various movements mentioned on the videos. Sources noted refer to Josephus. “Ant.” refers to his *Antiquities of the Jews* and “Wars” to his *The Wars of the Jews*.

BC

- 40’s** **Hezekiah** the “Chief Brigand” killed by Herod
- 20** **Pollio and Samaias** refuse oath to Herod (Ant. 15:370)
- 10** 6,000 plus **Pharisees** refuse oath to Caesar (Ant. 17:41-46)
- 4** **Eagle Incident**, Judas and Matthias (Ant. 17:149-167, Wars 1:648-655)
Passover Revolt suppressed by Archelaus
Revolt of Judas, son of Hezekiah (Wars 2:56)
2,000 insurgents crucified
Messianic movements of Simon and Athronges (Ant. 17: 273-7)
Feast of Pentecost revolt squashed by Varus (Ant. 17:250-254, Wars 2:39-50)

AD

- 6** **Census riots** led by Judas the Galilean (Ant. 18:4-10, 23-25, Wars 2:118, Acts 5:37)
- 26-36** **Several incidents** under procuratorship of Pontius Pilate
- Mid 40’s** **“Brigand chief” Tholomaeus executed** under Cuspius Fadus (Ant. 20:5)
The “Prophet” Theudas executed (Ant. 20:97-99, Acts 5:36)
- 46-48** **Jacob and Simon crucified** (sons of Judas the Galilean) under Procurator Tiberius Alexander (Ant. 20:102)
- c. 50** **Passover Riot** under Procurator Cumanus. 20,000 Jews killed
- 52-60** **Procurator Felix purges the *lestai***. Many crucifixions (Wars 2:253)
- c. 60** ***Sicarii* (Daggersmen) group emerges**
- c. 60** **An Egyptian Jew stirs thousands in revolt**. Romans suppress. Wars 2:261-263 (30,000), Acts 21:38 (4,000)
- 66-73** **The Jewish War**
John of Gischala, Menahem (descendant of Judas the Galilean) Simon ben Giora. Jerusalem and temple destroyed. 1,000 commit suicide at Masada.
- 133-135** **Rebellion led by Simeon ben Kosiba**, named bar Kochba and hailed as Messiah by Rabbi Akiba. Emperor Hadrian decimates Jews. Many Jews sold into slavery. Jerusalem becomes fully pagan city. Ban on Jewish customs strictly enforced.

APPENDIX B: JUDAS MACCABAEUS RECLAIMS AND CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE

In this series, Dr. Wright often emphasizes the prominent place in the thinking of Jesus' contemporaries of the cleansing of the Temple under Judas Maccabaeus in the year 165 B.C. Here is the account of that landmark event, still celebrated by Jews today as the feast of Chanukah.

I Maccabees 4:36-61 (NRSV)

³⁶ Then Judas and his brothers said, "See, our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it." ³⁷ So all the army assembled and went up to Mount Zion. ³⁸ There they saw the sanctuary desolate, the altar profaned, and the gates burned. In the courts they saw bushes sprung up as in a thicket, or as on one of the mountains. They saw also the chambers of the priests in ruins. ³⁹ Then they tore their clothes and mourned with great lamentation; they sprinkled themselves with ashes ⁴⁰ and fell face down on the ground. And when the signal was given with the trumpets, they cried out to Heaven.

⁴¹ Then Judas detailed men to fight against those in the citadel until he had cleansed the sanctuary. ⁴² He chose blameless priests devoted to the law, ⁴³ and they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place. ⁴⁴ They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been profaned. ⁴⁵ And they thought it best to tear it down, so that it would not be a lasting shame to them that the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, ⁴⁶ and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them. ⁴⁷ Then they took unhewn stones, as the law directs, and built a new altar like the former one. ⁴⁸ They also rebuilt the sanctuary and the interior of the temple, and consecrated the courts. ⁴⁹ They made new holy vessels, and brought the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table into the temple. ⁵⁰ Then they offered incense on the altar and lit the lamps on the lampstand, and these gave light in the temple. ⁵¹ They placed the bread on the table and hung up the curtains. Thus they finished all the work they had undertaken.

⁵² Early in the morning on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month, which is the month of Chis'lev, in the one hundred forty-eighth year, ⁵³ they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering that they had built. ⁵⁴ At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. ⁵⁵ All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them. ⁵⁶ So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days, and joyfully offered burnt offerings; they offered a sacrifice of well-being and a thanksgiving offering. ⁵⁷ They decorated the front of the temple with golden crowns and small shields; they restored the gates and the chambers for the priests, and fitted them with doors. ⁵⁸ There was very great joy among the people, and the disgrace brought by the Gentiles was removed.

⁵⁹ Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with joy and gladness for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev.

⁶⁰ At that time they fortified Mount Zion with high walls and strong towers all around, to keep the Gentiles from coming and trampling them down as they had done before. ⁶¹ Judas stationed a garrison there to guard it; he also fortified Beth-zur to guard it, so that the people might have a stronghold that faced Idumea.

APPENDIX C: JEWISH VIEWS OF RESURRECTION

Program six mentions various understandings of resurrection among first century Jews. Some texts are briefly referred to on screen. Here are two of the passages in their larger context. From the report on the martyrdom of Seven Brothers.

II Maccabees 7:7-14; 20-23 (NRSV):

⁷ After the first brother had died in this way, they brought forward the second for their sport. They tore off the skin of his head with the hair, and asked him, "Will you eat rather than have your body punished limb by limb?" ⁸ He replied in the language of his ancestors and said to them, "No." Therefore he in turn underwent tortures as the first brother had done. ⁹ And when he was at his last breath, he said, "You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws."

¹⁰ After him, the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, ¹¹ and said nobly, "I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again." ¹² As a result the king himself and those with him were astonished at the young man's spirit, for he regarded his sufferings as nothing.

¹³ After he too had died they maltreated and tortured the fourth in the same way. ¹⁴ When he was near death, he said, "One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!" . . .

²⁰ The mother was especially admirable and worthy of honorable memory. Although she saw her seven sons perish within a single day, she bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord. ²¹ She encouraged each of them in the language of their ancestors. Filled with a noble spirit, she reinforced her woman's reasoning with a man's courage, and said to them, ²² "I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. ²³ Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws."

Wisdom of Solomon 2:21– 3:9 (NRSV)

²¹ Thus they reasoned, but they were led astray, for their wickedness blinded them, ²² and they did not know the secret purposes of God, nor hoped for the wages of holiness, nor discerned the prize for blameless souls; ²³ for God created us for incorruption, and made us in the image of his own eternity, ²⁴ but through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it.

[Chapter 3] But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. ² In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster, ³ and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. ⁴ For though in the sight of others they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. ⁵ Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself; ⁶ like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them. ⁷ In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble. ⁸ They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them forever. ⁹ Those who trust in him will understand truth, and the faithful will abide with him in love, because grace and mercy are upon his holy ones, and he watches over his elect.

APPENDIX D: DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE

Much emphasis is placed in this series on the role of the Temple in Jewish life in Jesus' day, the challenge of Jesus to the Temple and its leaders, and the predictions of Jesus regarding the Temple's destruction. Here is Josephus' account of the Temple's destruction by Titus from *The Wars of the Jews*, Book six, Chapters 4-5.

[Chapter 4] When the banks were completed, and the battering-rams brought, and could do nothing, Titus gave orders to set fire the gates of the Temple; in no long time after which the Holy House itself was burnt down, even against his consent.

1. (220) And now two of the legions had completed their banks on the eighth day of the month Lous [Ab]. Whereupon Titus gave orders that the battering-rams should be brought and set over against the western edifice of the inner temple; (221) for before these were brought the firmest of all the other engines had battered the wall for six days together without ceasing, without making any impression upon it; but the vast largeness and strong connection of the stones were superior to that engine, and to the other battering-rams also. (222) Other Romans did indeed undermine the foundations of the northern gate, and, after a world of pains, removed the outermost stones, yet was the gate still upheld by the inner stones, and stood still unhurt; till the workmen, despairing of all such attempts by engines and crows, brought their ladders to the cloisters. (223) Now the Jews did not interrupt them in so doing; but when they were gotten up, they fell upon them and fought with them; some of them they thrust down, and threw them backwards headlong; others of them they met and slew; (224) they also beat many of those that went down the ladders again, and slew them with their swords before they could bring their shields to protect them; nay, some of the ladders they threw down from above when they were full of armed men; (225) a great slaughter was made of the Jews also at the same time, while those that bare the ensigns fought hard for them, as deeming it a terrible thing, and what would tend to their great shame, if they permitted them to be stolen away. (226) Yet did the Jews at length get possession of these engines, and destroyed those that had gone up the ladders, while the rest were so intimidated by what those suffered who were slain, that they retired; (227) although none of the Romans died without having done good service before his death. Of the seditious, those that had fought bravely in the former battles, did the like now; as besides them did Eleazar, the brother's son of Simon the tyrant. (228) But when Titus perceived that his endeavors to spare a foreign temple turned to the damage of his soldiers and made them be killed, he gave orders to set the gates on fire.

2. (229) In the meantime there deserted to him Ananus, who came from Emmaus, the most bloody of all Simon's guards, and Archelaus, the son of Magadatus, they hoping to be still forgiven, because they left the Jews at a time when they were the conquerors. (230) Titus objected this to these men, as a cunning trick of theirs; and as he had been informed of their other barbarities toward the Jews, he was going in all haste to have them both slain. He told them that they were only driven to this desertion because of the utmost distress they were in, and did not come away of their own good disposition; and that those did not deserve to be preserved, by whom their own city was already set on fire, out of which fire they now hurried themselves away. (231) However, the security he had promised deserters overcame his resentments, and he dismissed them accordingly, though he did not give them the same privileges that he had afforded to others; (232) and now the soldiers had already put fire to the gates, and the silver that was over them quickly carried the flames to the wood that was within it, whence it spread itself all on the sudden, and caught hold of the cloisters. (233) Upon the Jews' seeing this fire all about them, their spirits sunk, together with their bodies, and they were under such astonishment, that not one of them made any haste, either to defend himself or to quench the fire, but they stood as mute spectators of it only. (234) However, they did not so grieve at the loss of what was now burning as to grow wiser thereby for the time to come; but as though the holy house itself had

been on fire already, they whetted their passions against the Romans. (235) This fire prevailed during that day and the next also; for the soldiers were not able to burn all the cloisters that were round about together at one time, but only by pieces.

3. (236) But then, on the next day, Titus commanded part of his army to quench the fire, and to make a road for them more easy marching up of the legions, while he himself gathered the commanders together. (237) Of those there were assembled the six principal persons: Tiberius Alexander, the commander [under the general] of the whole army; with Sextus Cerealis the commander of the fifth legion; and Larcus Lepidus, the commander of the tenth legion; and Titus Frigijs the commander of the fifteenth legion; (238) there was also with them Eternius, the leader of the two legions that came from Alexandria; and Marcus Antonius Julianus, procurator of Judea; after these came together all the rest of the procurators and tribunes. Titus proposed to these that they should give him their advice what should be done about the holy house. (239) Now, some of these thought it would be the best way to act according to the rules of war [and demolish it]; because the Jews would never leave off rebelling while that house was standing; at which house it was that they used to get all together. (244) Others of them were of opinion, that in case the Jews would leave it, and none of them would lay their arms up in it, he might save it; but that in case they got upon it, and fought any more, he might burn it; because it must then be looked upon not as a holy house, but as a citadel; and that the impiety of burning it would then belong to those that forced this to be done, and not to them. (241) But Titus said, that "although the Jews should get upon that holy house, and fight us thence, yet ought we not to revenge ourselves on things that are inanimate, instead of the men themselves;" and that he was not in any case for burning down so vast a work as that was, because this would be a mischief to the Romans themselves, as it would be an ornament to their government while it continued. (242) So Fronto, and Alexander, and Cerealis, grew bold upon that declaration, and agreed to the opinion of Titus. (243) Then was this assembly dissolved, when Titus had given orders to the commanders that the rest of their forces should lie still; but that they should make use of such as were most courageous in this attack. So he commanded that the chosen men that were taken out of the cohorts should make their way through the ruins, and quench the fire.

4. (244) Now it is true, that on this day the Jews were so weary, and under such consternation, that they refrained from any attacks; but on the next day they gathered their whole force together, and ran upon those that guarded the outward court of the temple, very boldly, through the east gate, and this about the second hour of the day. (245) These guards received that their attack with great bravery, and by covering themselves with their shields before, as if it were with a wall, they drew their squadrons close together; yet was it evident that they could not abide there very long, but would be overborne by the multitude of those that sallied out upon them, and by the heat of their passion. (246) However, Caesar seeing, from the tower of Antonia, that this squadron was likely to give way, he sent some chosen horsemen to support them. (247) Hereupon the Jews found themselves not able to sustain their onset, and upon the slaughter of those in the forefront, many of the rest were put to flight; (248) but as the Romans were going off, the Jews turned back upon them and fought them; and as those Romans came back upon them, they retreated again, until about the fifth hour of the day they were overborne, and shut themselves up in the inner [court of the] temple.

5. (249) So Titus retired into the tower of Antonia, and resolved to storm the temple the next day, early in the morning, with his whole army, and to encamp round about the holy house; (250) but, as for that house, God had for certain long ago doomed it to the fire; and now that fatal day was come, according to the revolution of ages; it was the tenth day of the month Lous [Ab], upon which it was formerly burnt by the king of Babylon; (251) although these flames took their rise from the Jews themselves, and were occasioned by them; for upon Titus's retiring, the seditious lay still for a little while, and then attacked the Romans again, when those that guarded the holy house fought with those that quenched the fire that was burning in the inner [court of the] temple; but these Romans put the Jews to flight, and proceeded as far as the holy house itself. (252) At which time one of the soldiers, without any concern or dread upon him at so great an undertaking, and being hurried on by a certain divine fury, snatched somewhat out of the materials that were on fire, and being lifted up by another soldier, he set fire to a golden win-

dow, through which there was a passage to the rooms that were round about the holy house, on the north side of it. (253) As the flames went upward the Jews made a clamor, such as so mighty an affliction required, and ran together to prevent it; and now they spared not their lives any longer, nor suffered anything to restrain their force, since that holy house was perishing, for whose sake it was that they kept such a guard about it.

6. (254) And now a certain person came running to Titus, and told him of this fire, as he was resting himself in his tent after the last battle; whereupon he rose up in great haste and, as he was, ran to the holy house, in order to have a stop put to the fire; (255) after him followed all his commanders, and after them followed the several legions, in great astonishment; so there was a great clamor and tumult raised, as was natural upon the disorderly motion of so great an army. (256) Then did Caesar, both by calling to the soldiers that were fighting, with a loud voice, and by giving a signal to them with his right hand, order them to quench the fire; (257) but they did not hear what he said, though he spake so loud, having their ears already dinned by a greater noise another way; nor did they attend to the signal he made with his hand neither, as still some of them were distracted with fighting, and others with passion; but as for the legions that came running thither, neither any persuasions nor any threatenings could restrain their violence, but each one's own passion was his commander at this time; and as they were crowding into the temple together, many of them were trampled on by one another, while a great number fell among the ruins of the cloisters, which were still hot and smoking, and were destroyed in the same miserable way with those whom they had conquered; (258) and when they were come near the holy house, they made as if they did not so much as hear Caesar's orders to the contrary; but they encouraged those that were before them to set it on fire. (259) As for the seditious, they were in too great distress already to afford their assistance [towards quenching the fire]; they were everywhere slain, and everywhere beaten; and as for a great part of the people, they were weak and without arms, and had their throats cut wherever they were caught. Now, round about the altar lay dead bodies heaped one upon another; as at the steps going up to it ran a great quantity of their blood, whither also the dead bodies that were slain above [on the altar] fell down.

7. (260) And now, since Caesar was no way able to restrain the enthusiastic fury of the soldiers, and the fire proceeded on more and more, he went into the holy place of the temple; with his commanders, and saw it, with what was in it, which he found to be far superior to what the relations of foreigners contained, and not inferior to what we ourselves boasted of and believed about it; (261) but as the flame had not as yet reached to its inward parts, but was still consuming the rooms that were about the holy house, and Titus supposing what the fact was, that the house itself might yet be saved, (262) he came in haste and endeavored to persuade the soldiers to quench the fire, and gave order to Liberalius the centurion, and one of those spearmen that were about him, to beat the soldiers that were refractory with their staves, and to restrain them, (263) yet were their passions too hard for the regards they had for Caesar, and the dread they had of him who forbade them, as was their hatred of the Jews, and a certain vehement inclination to fight them, too hard for them also. (264) Moreover, the hope of plunder induced many to go on, as having this opinion, that all of the places within were full of money, and as seeing that all round about it was made of gold; (265) and besides, one of those that went into the place prevented Caesar, when he ran so hastily out to restrain the soldiers, and threw the fire upon the hinges of the gate, in the dark; (266) whereby the flame burst out from within the holy house itself immediately, when the commanders retired, and Caesar with them, and when nobody any longer forbade those that were without to set fire to it; and thus the holy house burnt down, without Caesar's approbation.

8. (267) Now although anyone would justly lament the destruction of such a work as this was, since it was the most admirable of all the works that we have seen or heard of, both for its curious structure and its magnitude, and also for the vast wealth bestowed upon it, as well as for the glorious reputation it had for its holiness; yet might such a one comfort himself with this thought, that it was fate that decreed it so to be, which is inevitable, both as to living creatures and as to works and places also. (268) However, one cannot but wonder at the accuracy of this period thereto relating; for the same month and day were now observed, as I said before, wherein the holy house was burnt formerly by the Babylonians. (269) Now the number of years that

passed from its first foundation, which was laid by king Solomon, till this its destruction, which happened in the second year of the reign of Vespasian, are collected to be one thousand one hundred and thirty, besides sever months and fifteen days; (270) and from the second building of it, which was done by Haggai, in the second year of Cyrus the king, till its destruction under Vespasian, there were six hundred and thirty-nine years and forty-five days.

[Chapter 5] The great distress the Jews were in upon the conflagration of the Holy House. Concerning a false prophet, and the signs that preceded this destruction.

1. (271) While the holy house was on fire, everything was plundered that came to hand, and ten thousand of those that were caught were slain; nor was there a commiseration of any age, or any reverence of gravity; but children and old men, and profane persons, and priests, were all slain in the same manner; so that his war went round all sorts of men, and brought them to destruction, and as well those that made supplication for their lives as those that defended themselves by fighting. (272) The flame was also carried a long way, and made an echo, together with the groans of those that were slain; and because this hill was high, and the works at the temple were very great, one would have thought the whole city had been on fire. Nor can one imagine anything either greater or more terrible than this noise; (273) for there was at once a shout of the Roman legions, who were marching all together, and a sad clamor of the seditious, who were now surrounded with fire and sword. The people also that were left above were beaten back upon the enemy, and under a great consternation, and made sad moans at the calamity they were under; (274) the multitude also that was in the city joined in this outcry with those that were upon the hill; and besides, many of those that were worn away by the famine, and their mouths almost closed, when they saw the fire of the holy house, they exerted their utmost strength, and broke out into groans and outcries again: Perea did also return the echo, as well as the mountains round about [the city], and augmented the force of the entire noise. (275) Yet was the misery itself more terrible than this disorder; for one would have thought that the hill itself, on which the temple stood, was seething hot, as full of fire on every part of it, that the blood was larger in quantity than the fire, and those that were slain more in number than those that slew them; (276) for the ground did nowhere appear visible, for the dead bodies that lay on it; but the soldiers went over heaps of these bodies, as they ran upon such as fled from them. (277) And now it was that the multitude of the robbers were thrust out [of the inner court of the temple] by the Romans, and had much ado to get into the outer court, and from thence into the city, while the remainder of the populace fled into the cloister of that outer court. (278) As for the priests, some of them plucked up from the holy house the spikes that were upon it, with their bases, which were made of lead, and shot them at the Romans instead of darts. (279) But then as they gained nothing by so doing, and as the fire burst out upon them, they retired to the wall that was eight cubits broad, and there they tarried; (280) yet did two of these of eminence among them, who might have saved themselves by going over to the Romans, or have borne up with courage, and taken their fortune with the others, throw themselves into the fire, and were brunt together with the holy house; their names were Meirus the son of Belgas, and Joseph the son of Daleus.

2. (281) And now the Romans, judging that it was in vain to spare what was round about the holy house, burnt all those places, as also the remains of the cloisters, and the gates, two excepted; the one on the east side, and the other on the south; both which, however, they burnt afterward. (282) They also burnt down the treasury chambers, in which was an immense quantity of money, and an immense number of garments, and other precious goods, there repositied; and to speak all in a few words, there it was that the entire riches of the Jews were heaped up together, while the rich people had there built themselves chambers [to contain such furniture]. (283) The soldiers also came to the rest of the cloisters that were in the outer [court of the] temple, whither the women and children, and a great mixed multitude of the people fled, in number about six thousand. (284) But before Caesar had determined anything about these people, or given the commanders any orders relating to them, the soldiers were in such a rage, that they set the cloister on fire; by which means it came to pass that some of these were destroyed by throwing themselves down headlong, and some were burnt in the cloisters themselves. Nor did any one of them escape with his life.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

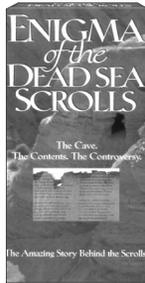
VIDEOS

In preparing this series we have drawn upon a rich variety of visual resources to illustrate the subjects that Dr. Wright deals with. These include some excellent video programs about Jesus or related subjects. We express our deep appreciation to the producers for permission to make use of their material, and we expect you may find several of these of interest to you. These two pages include many of the videos utilized as well as other related programs. They may be ordered from Vision Video at 1-800-523-0226 or www.visionvideo.com. (Prices subject to change according to producer's discretion.)

— Three from Catherine Mossek —

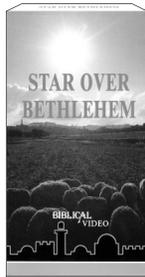
Enigma of the Dead Sea Scrolls

An introduction and examination of key issues related to the Dead Sea Scrolls, widely regarded as the most significant archeological discovery of the twentieth century. This program investigates the scrolls, the controversies, the key players, and what the discoveries have contributed to our understanding of the ancient world and the Bible. 50 minutes. VHS - #01416, \$14.99



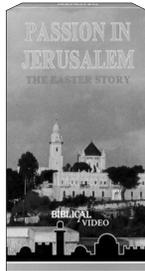
Star Over Bethlehem

Experience the wonders of Christmas more fully. From the Annunciation in Nazareth to the Nativity in Bethlehem, the story is full of insight and joy. The film includes ancient traditions, Biblical sites and ancient chants. Filmed on the actual locations in the Holy Land, this is the complete Christmas story. 30 minutes, VHS - #4140, \$12.99



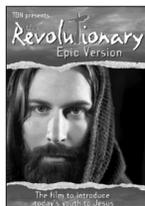
Passion in Jerusalem

A visit to the very places where the climactic events in Jesus' life took place! The Easter story and the great events which led to the crucifixion and the resurrection are dramatically presented with passion and joy. This production is filmed on all the traditional locations associated with the Holy Week. 30 minutes. VHS - #4139, \$12.99



The Revolutionary Epic (Trinity Broadcasting Network)

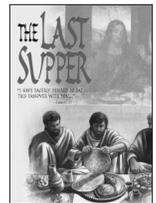
This fast-paced film on Jesus, made in high definition technology, shows His life and teaching in a way never seen before. The main events from the Gospel sources are presented with careful attention to detail and the original historical and cultural context. In letterbox format. DVD - #4654D or VHS - #4259, \$19.99



— Two from Ark Productions —

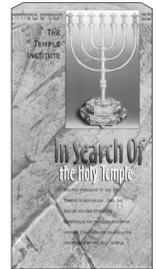
The Last Supper

The Lord's Supper will take on deeper meaning as you absorb this extensive program filmed and dramatized entirely at authentic locations of the Holy Land and the Middle East. It emphasizes both Christian tradition and Jewish roots and explores the recipes of the exotic courses served at the last supper. 60 minutes. DVD - #4811D or VHS - #99769, \$19.99



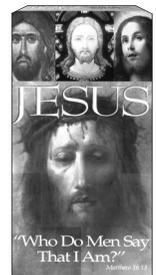
In Search of the Holy Temple

Why does the world turn its collective eyes to Jerusalem, the birthplace of three of the world's major religions? What significance does the temple play in the unfolding history of the Middle East? Now through the miracle of computer animation, you can see the temple as it was over 2,000 years ago. 25 minutes. VHS - #3788, \$19.99



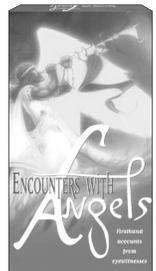
Jesus: Who Do Men Say that I Am? (Horizon Television)

Who is this unforgettable and incomparable man called Jesus? Was He a man of miracles, a rebel, an imposter? What do modern Americans think of Him? Intriguing investigations with everyday people and leading Bible scholars reveal some refreshing and often startling answers. A thought-provoking portrait to challenge all. 48 minutes. VHS - #4163, \$14.99



Encounters with Angels (Mark-It Television)

This program features many eye-witness reports of people who have seen and heard angels. Their experiences are real and genuine and offer insight into the character of God as he uses his angels to encourage and protect. Mentioned in over 300 verses in the Bible, angels are still alive today in the 20th century as they continue the spiritual battle which will eventually reconcile man with God. 47 minutes. VHS - #4246, \$14.99



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES CONTINUED

Two from Christian History Institute

Discovering the Bible

This four-part curriculum series is a basic introduction to the Bible. It looks at where the Bible came from, how it was passed down to us, how the Old and New Testaments are organized, and more. The flexible curriculum can be adapted to a four- or eight-week program. The complete curriculum kit on VHS or DVD includes four half-hour programs and a genuine piece of papyrus from the Nile River with printed full-color companion overview, leader's guide, reproducible student worksheets, and six bulletin inserts. The DVD is also available without printed materials and includes pdfs of the companion overview, leader's guide, worksheets and inserts.



VHS curriculum kit - #4157, \$59.99
 DVD curriculum kit - #500771D, \$59.99
 DVD with pdfs - #500795D, \$49.99

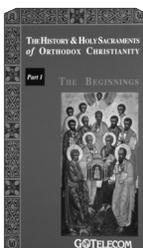
From Christ to Constantine: The Trial and Testimony of the Early Church

The first three centuries were decisive for Christianity. The very existence of the church itself was threatened by powerful opponents who wanted to destroy it. These programs go to the locations and use dramatic re-creations to bring you close to the early believers. Your kit includes six 30-minute programs, curriculum, full-color companion book, film scripts, leader's guide, and reproducible student worksheets and bulletin inserts. VHS curriculum kit - #4043, \$79.99



History of Orthodox Christianity: Tape 1, "The Beginnings" (GOTelecom)

Intended as an introduction to the Orthodox Church, this program, produced by GOTelecom (Greek Orthodox Telecommunications), will be especially appreciated by those unfamiliar with this ancient Christian church. The production was filmed in Greece, Israel, Syria, Egypt, Turkey, Russia, Italy, England, and the United States. In *The Beginnings*, the journey begins with the founding of the Church and continues with the spread of Christianity to the "nations" by the Apostles. This is the period of persecutions and martyrdom and the subsequent legalization of the Church during the birth of Byzantium. 30 minutes. VHS - #4092, \$24.99 (Entire three-tape set with comprehensive study guide available for \$59.99, VHS - #4095)



Two by Leonardo Defilippis

The Gift of Peace

In this unique one-man dramatization, highly-acclaimed actor Leonardo Defilippis captures the life and powerful meaning of Christ's infancy and early ministry. Defilippis masterfully transforms himself into the aged Zechariah, the humble young Mary, the cynical Pharisees and the delightful Peter. 60 minutes. VHS - #99857, \$19.99



The Passion According to Luke

Actor Leonardo Defilippis' performance of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, taken directly from Scripture, draws his audience into a deep understanding of the immensity of God's love for His children. From the entry into Jerusalem to the Resurrection, Defilippis delivers a powerful performance that speaks to the heart. 60 minutes. VHS - #99856, \$15.99



I, Paul

(Arbusto & Associates)

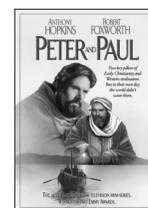
Paul is in prison. Concern for the future of the churches weighs heavily upon him. He ponders how to guide his young disciple. The result is Paul's legacy to the ages in the form of his Second Epistle to Timothy. With clarity and power, the imprisoned Paul gives forth his message. This re-enacted slice of New Testament life uses Scripture itself for the entire script and captures the passion and compassion of Paul as he neared the end of his life. 31 minutes, #4018, \$14.99



Also Available

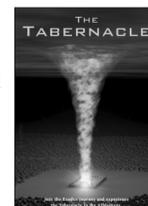
Peter and Paul

This distinguished Emmy Award-winning production, starring Anthony Hopkins and Robert Foxworth, captures the vitality, intensity, and humanity of two who were entrusted by Christ with history's greatest stewardship—the carrying of the Gospel to all the world. 194 minutes. DVD - #4628D or VHS - #4184, \$29.99. (Comprehensive 112-page study guide - #4185, \$19.99)



The Tabernacle

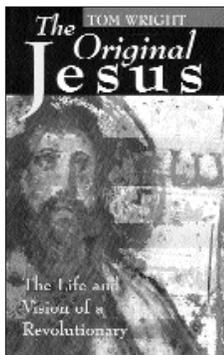
Here is an intriguing walk through the ancient Tabernacle. This meeting place between sinful man and Holy God is seen in stunning three-dimensional computer-generated detail in this award-winning video. 28 minutes. DVD - #4791D or VHS - #1200, \$19.99 (comprehensive 53-page student workbook, #4521, \$14.99)



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES CONTINUED

BOOKS

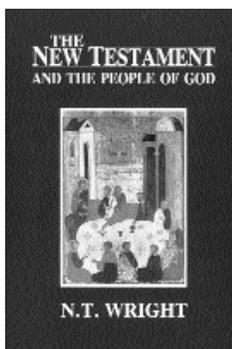
After viewing this series many will be eager to learn more and dig deeper. The video programs you have viewed are based on extensive research, that only scratch the surface. Fortunately there are several works in print that present the larger scope of Dr. Wright's Jesus research, and we are happy to recommend them to you here. (Order from your bookseller. We do not handle book sales.)



The Original Jesus: The Life and Vision of a Revolutionary

Wm. B. Eerdmans
Publishing Company
Grand Rapids, Michigan
1996
160 Pages

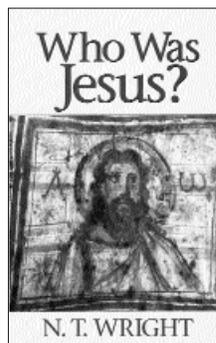
This would be the work most suited for the wider audience. It would be especially attractive for young people. In this work Dr. Wright digests the main thrust of his weightier works into a more popular presentation, amply illustrated with color photos. The text was developed from scripts originally written for presentation in a BBC television series in which Dr. Wright concedes that he had to "change gears and speak as simply and directly as I could, in non-technical language."



The New Testament and the People of God

Fortress Press
Minneapolis, Minnesota
1992
532 Pages

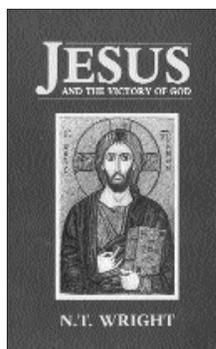
This is the first of what is expected to be a five volume series on the New Testament by Tom Wright. The volume provides an introduction to the series and goes into extensive analysis of first-century Judaism in the context of the Graeco-Roman world. Here is the foundational and scholarly work for Wright's Biblical studies that provides much of the vital background for the video series. It will be appreciated most by the specialist familiar with the original languages but will also reward all ready to invest serious attention.



Who Was Jesus?

Wm. B. Eerdmans
Publishing Company
Grand Rapids, Michigan
1992
106 Pages

In this work Dr. Wright takes on some of the popular controversial books about Jesus by authors Barbara Thiering, A. N. Wilson, and John Shelby Spong. His analysis and refutation of the skeptical stances taken by such authors is invaluable not only for addressing the issues raised in their particular books, but as a way of addressing the key questions involved in coming to the Gospels and the questions implicit in examining their historicity and reliability.



Jesus and the Victory of God

Fortress Press
Minneapolis, Minnesota
1996
740 Pages

If we had to suggest one book that would tie in most directly with the video series, this would be it; for in these pages Wright details in page after page amply foot-noted sources that develop and elaborate on what could only be hinted at or stated in the most summary fashion in the video programs. The excellent index allows to go right to the key topics covered. As in the video programs, this is Jesus approached primarily from the synoptic Gospels with only little attention given to John.