

90 Days
Through the
New Testament
IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

RON RHODES



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To Kerri, David, and Kylie

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Kerri, David, and Kylie—

The sun seems to shine brighter with you in my world!
What an awesome family the Lord has given us.

All my friends at Harvest House Publishers—

Your collective efforts have spiritually enriched multitudes
around the globe.
I feel privileged to work with you!

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Introduction

Thank you for joining me on this exciting journey through the New Testament. You are in for a spiritually uplifting time! My hope and prayer is that as you read *90 Days Through the New Testament in Chronological Order*, you will...

- experience a growing love for the Word of God,
- grow in your knowledge of and appreciation for the wondrous salvation you have in Jesus Christ,
- experience more daily intimacy with Jesus than ever before,
- understand and experience God's incredible grace in your daily walk with Him,
- grow in your knowledge of the Holy Spirit and dependence on Him as He empowers you to live the Christian life,
- grow in your faith and trust in God in the midst of life's troubles, and
- gain an eternal perspective so that you see life's problems and difficulties from heaven's vantage point.

As we begin our journey together, I want to address a few things that will lay a foundation for better understanding the New Testament. Let's look at the big picture first and consider some preliminary matters about how this book is arranged. Then we will zero in on our chronological study of the New Testament.

The Significance of the New Testament

The New Testament is a collection of 27 writings composed over a 50-year period by nine different authors from various walks of life. The primary personality of the New Testament is Jesus Christ. The primary theme is salvation in Jesus Christ, based on the new covenant.

The word “testament” refers to a covenant or agreement. The Old Testament focuses on an old covenant between God and the Israelites. According to that covenant (the Sinai covenant), the Jews were to be God’s people and render obedience to Him, and in return God would bless them (Exodus 19:3-25). Israel failed repeatedly and continually violated this covenant. So even in Old Testament times, the prophets began to speak of a new covenant that would focus not on keeping external laws but on an inner reality and change in the human heart (Jeremiah 31:31). Unlike the Sinai covenant, the new covenant was to make full provision for the forgiveness of sins.

When Jesus ate the Passover meal with the disciples in the upper room, He spoke of the cup as “the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20; see also 1 Corinthians 11:25). Hebrews 7 demonstrates that Christ’s priesthood is superior to the old priesthood, and it logically follows that such a superior priesthood would have a superior ministry. Such a ministry is provided for in the new covenant. Jesus has done all that is necessary for the forgiveness of sins by His once-for-all sacrifice on the cross. This new covenant is the basis for our relationship with God in the New Testament.

The Books of the New Testament

The first four books of the New Testament are the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each of these contains an account of the life of Christ. None portrays all the details of His life, but taken together, they provide a full composite account.

Each Gospel author included different details, depending on his purpose for writing. For example, the Gospel of Matthew has more citations from the Old Testament than any other Gospel because Matthew sought to prove to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. Mark, by contrast, had no such Jewish motivation,

but instead sought to portray Jesus in action rather than as a teacher. Luke's Gospel stresses the wonderful blessings of salvation for all people. John's Gospel focuses heavily on the identity of Jesus and thoroughly demonstrates His deity.

Following the Gospels is the book of Acts, which traces the spread of Christianity following the death and resurrection of Christ. Though the book is traditionally understood as the acts of the apostles, it is probably more appropriately understood as the acts of the Holy Spirit, for truly it is the Holy Spirit who seems to be active in just about every chapter of the book.

Following the book of Acts are the epistles, or letters. The apostle Paul wrote 13 of these, and the rest were written by other followers of Jesus. Many of the New Testament epistles were written to brand-new churches that had certain issues that needed to be addressed (1 and 2 Thessalonians are examples). The apostle Paul often wrote letters to follow up his missionary visits to churches. (For example, Paul wrote Ephesians following his visit to the church at Ephesus.) Therefore, Paul's letters are often personal. In some cases, Paul gave advice to the leader of a particular church. (Such was the case when Paul wrote 1 Timothy.) Other times he addressed the church as a whole. (Philippians is a good example.)

Other New Testament epistles—the “general epistles”—were not directed at specific churches, but were circulated to a number of churches and dealt with general concerns. These are primarily the non-Pauline epistles, such as James; 1 and 2 Peter; and 1, 2, and 3 John.

Though the epistles were originally written for first-century Christians, they have tremendous relevance for Christians today. Indeed, the issues dealt with in the epistles are relevant to every generation. We need spiritual instruction just as the ancients did.

The final book of the New Testament is the book of Revelation, which is an apocalyptic book full of prophecy. This book was written to persecuted believers to give them hope, inspiration, and comfort so they could patiently endure the struggles they were facing. The book demonstrates that God wins in the end and that we will all live face-to-face with Him forever in new heavens and a new earth. The book

also gives strong hope to current-day Christians who live in an increasingly troubled world.

The Inspiration of the New Testament Books

The biblical Greek word translated “inspired” literally means “God-breathed.” Biblical inspiration may be defined as God’s superintending of the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities and writing styles, they composed and recorded without error His revelation to humankind in the words of the original autographs (handwritten manuscripts). In other words, the original documents of the Bible were written by men who, though permitted to exercise their own personalities and literary talents, wrote under the control and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the result being a perfect and errorless recording of the exact message God desired to give to man.

The writers of Scripture were thus not mere writing machines. God did not use them like keys on a typewriter to mechanically reproduce His message. Nor did He dictate the words, page by page. The biblical evidence shows that each writer had a style of his own. Matthew’s writing had Jewish overtones, Mark’s writing was action-oriented, Luke’s style had medical overtones, John was very simple in his approach, and Paul had a theological style. The Holy Spirit infallibly worked through each of these writers, through their individual styles, to communicate His message without error to humankind. This means that you can trust your New Testament (and, of course, the Old Testament as well).

The New Testament Canon

The word “canon” comes from a Greek word that means “measuring stick.” Over time, the word eventually came to be used metaphorically of books that were “measured” and thereby recognized as being God’s Word. When we talk about the canon of Scripture today, we are referring to all the biblical books that collectively constitute God’s Word.

Many books written during New Testament times were recognized as being the Word of God at that time. In 1 Timothy 5:18, for example, the apostle Paul joined an Old Testament reference and a

New Testament reference and called them both (collectively) Scripture (Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7). It would not have been unusual in the context of first-century Judaism for an Old Testament passage to be called Scripture. But for a New Testament book to be referred to as Scripture so soon after it was written says volumes about Paul's view of the authority of contemporary New Testament books.

Only three years elapsed between the writing of the Gospel of Luke and the writing of 1 Timothy. (Luke was written around AD 60, and 1 Timothy was written around AD 63.) Despite this, Paul—himself a Jew, a “Hebrew of Hebrews”—does not hesitate to place Luke on the same level of authority as the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy.

Further, the writings of the apostle Paul were recognized as Scripture by the apostle Peter (see 2 Peter 3:16). Paul, too, understood that his own writings were inspired by God and therefore authoritative (1 Corinthians 14:37; 1 Thessalonians 2:13). Paul, of course, wrote about half the New Testament books.

When the church formally recognized which books belonged in the canon at the Council of Carthage in AD 397, five primary tests were applied.

Was the book written or backed by a prophet or apostle of God? The reasoning here is that the Word of God which is inspired by the Spirit of God for the people of God must be communicated through a man of God. Second Peter 1:20-21 assures us that Scripture is written only by men of God. In Galatians 1:1-24 the apostle Paul argued for support of the letter he was writing by appealing to the fact that he was an authorized messenger of God, an apostle.

Is the book authoritative? In other words, can it be said of this book as it was said of Jesus, “The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law” (Mark 1:22)? Put another way, does this book ring with a sense of “Thus saith the Lord”?

Does the book tell the truth about God as it has already been revealed? The Bereans searched the Old Testament Scriptures to see whether Paul's teaching was true (Acts 17:11). They knew that if Paul's teaching did not accord with the Old Testament canon, it could not be of God.

Agreement with all earlier revelation is essential. Paul certainly recognized this, for he said to the Galatians, “Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8).

Does the book give evidence of having the power of God? The reasoning here is that any writing that does not exhibit the transforming power of God in the lives of its readers could not have come from God. Scripture says that the Word of God is living and active (Hebrews 4:12). Second Timothy 3:15-17 indicates that God’s Word has a transforming effect. If the book in question did not have the power to change lives, then the book could not have come from God.

Was the book accepted by the people of God? In the New Testament, Paul thanked the Thessalonians for receiving his message as the Word of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Paul’s letters were circulated among the churches (Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27). It is the norm that God’s people—that is, the majority of them and not simply a faction—will initially receive God’s Word as such.

Interestingly, in AD 367—some 30 years prior to the Council of Carthage—Athanasius (a bishop of Alexandria and a great champion of orthodoxy) wrote his Paschal Letter, in which he listed all the books of our present New Testament canon. So even before this definitive council met, the books that belonged in the New Testament were already known.

The bottom line is this: You can trust that the New Testament books are truly the Word of God.

The Reliability of the New Testament

The New Testament is not based on myth or hearsay. Rather, it is based on eyewitness testimony. John, who wrote the Gospel of John, said in his first epistle, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life...we proclaim also to you” (1 John 1:1-3). Peter likewise wrote, “We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power

and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Peter 1:16).

The Bible writers gave up their lives defending what they wrote. No one gives up his or her life in defense of a lie! Further, manuscript evidence and archeological discoveries give a convincing stamp of approval to the reliability of the New Testament.

The Authority of the New Testament

Scripture alone is the supreme and infallible authority for the church and the individual believer (1 Corinthians 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21). Certainly Jesus and the apostles often gave testimony to the absolute authority of the Bible as the Word of God. Jesus affirmed the Bible’s divine inspiration (Matthew 22:43), its indestructibility (Matthew 5:17-18), its infallibility (John 10:35), its final authority (Matthew 4:4,7,10), its historicity (Matthew 12:40; 24:37), and its factual inerrancy (Matthew 22:29; John 17:17).

Scripture has final authority because it is a direct revelation from God and carries the very authority of God Himself (Galatians 1:12). What the Bible says, God says. The Scriptures are the final court of appeal on all doctrinal and moral matters. We need no other source, and indeed no other source is authoritative and binding upon the Christian.

Jesus said, “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). He also said, “Until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18). He said, “It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void” (Luke 16:17). Jesus appealed to Scripture in every disputed matter. To the Sadducees He said, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matthew 22:29). He told some Pharisees that they invalidated the Word of God by their tradition that had been handed down (Mark 7:13). To the devil, Jesus consistently responded, “It is written...” (Matthew 4:4-10). Following Jesus’s lead, we must conclude that Scripture alone is our supreme and final authority.

This means that as we read the New Testament, we are not to

consider it as merely the words of men. Let's recognize it for what it is—the very Word of God, which has authority over our lives.

The Challenges of a Chronological Approach

There are some definite challenges to taking a chronological approach to studying the New Testament. The foremost is that biblical scholars differ on the exact chronological order of events. This point has been recognized by all the chronological study Bibles in print. *The Chronological Life Application Study Bible* states, “Organizing the Bible into chronological order is sometimes tricky, and excellent Christian scholars do not always agree on the order of certain books or passages.”¹ *The Chronological Study Bible: NIV* likewise affirms, “Rearranging the Bible is...a fallible human effort. Even those who have earned advanced degrees in the various fields of biblical studies would disagree on any particular rearrangement.”² *The Chronological Study Bible: New King James Version* adds, “Rearranging the biblical books chronologically is by no means easily accomplished, since Bible scholars differ on almost every important point of chronology.”³ That means no biblical chronology—including the one suggested in this book—should be considered inspired or inerrant, as is the Word of God.

As I wrestled through the New Testament chronology, I discovered that chronological problems surface most in the four Gospels. To be fair, none of the Gospel writers set out to write a precise chronology of the teachings and events in the life of Christ. They could have done this, but that wasn't their purpose. Each of the writers had a unique purpose in writing his Gospel, and the varied purposes account for many of the differences in chronology.

There has also been significant debate over the varying details contained in the Gospel accounts. But I believe there are viable reasons for these differences. Foundationally, we know from human experience that different people will notice different things about the same event. Simply because there are different details reported does not mean any of the reports are wrong. Each report can be unique but nevertheless correct.

One must also keep in mind that Jesus's ministry spanned some

three years—more than 1000 days. Many scholars believe it is extremely likely that He repeated the same teachings on many occasions. I am quite sure this is the case. This may account for some of the differences in the Gospel accounts on similar teachings of Christ. That is, Christ may have communicated the same truth on a number of different occasions, and on each occasion He may have communicated that truth in a slightly unique way. This has led some scholars to surmise that seemingly parallel accounts of a teaching may actually refer to two different teaching events. We can't be certain about such things, but I am convinced this is what happened. Of course, the important point is that Christ gave us these teachings, not the precise order in which He delivered them.

It is possible that some of the differences in the Gospel accounts are partly due to the reality that Jesus may have spoken three languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. The New Testament, of course, was written in Greek. If Jesus gave a teaching to a Jewish audience in Hebrew or Aramaic, each Gospel writer's rendering of that teaching in Greek may have been slightly different from the others'.⁴

Further, we must note that unlike modern writers, the ancients were not overly fixated on verbal exactitude. They didn't use quotation marks in those days. Nor did they use ellipsis dots to note that words were deleted, or brackets to indicate clarifying insertions by the Gospel writers. These are all modern inventions, and we would be wrong to impose such writing protocols on the ancients. But the biblical writers were nevertheless trustworthy in all that they wrote.

Perhaps an illustration might help. Imagine three bystanders witnessing a car accident at a street intersection.

The first witness says, "The truck hit the car."

The second witness says, "The girl in that red truck hit the blue car."

The third witness says, "The blond girl in that red Ford F-150 hit the blue sedan, driven by a redheaded guy with freckles."

These are not contradictory accounts. They are partial, complementary descriptions of what happened. Taken together, we can reconstruct a trustworthy composite report.

Consider the death of Judas. In Matthew 27:5, we are told that

Judas died by hanging himself. In Acts 1:18 we are told that Judas burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. These are both partial accounts. Neither account gives us the full picture. But taken together we can easily reconstruct how Judas died. He hanged himself first, and sometime later, the rope loosened and Judas fell to the rocks below, thereby causing his intestines to gush out.

Of course, the difference between the accident reports (in my illustration above) and the biblical writings is that the biblical writings were inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore are inerrant. You can trust the biblical accounts despite their differences because God superintended each of the biblical authors as he wrote.

This means that apparent contradictions in the Gospels are not really contradictions. There are differences, yes, but not actual contradictions. Certainly if all four Gospels were the same, with no differences, critics would be accusing the writers of collusion. The differences in the Gospels show that there was no collusion and that the Gospels represent four unique (but inspired) accounts of the same events.

As we probe into alleged contradictions in the Gospel accounts, we consistently see that they are all explainable in a reasonable way. Those who wish to study the issue of alleged contradictions in more detail may wish to consult my book *The Big Book of Bible Answers* (Harvest House Publishers, 2013).

How to Use This Book

As you begin each chapter, consider using this prayer.

Lord, I ask You to open my eyes and enhance my understanding so that I can grasp what You want me to learn today [Psalm 119:18]. I also ask You to enable me, by Your Spirit, to apply the truths I learn to my daily life and to be guided moment by moment by Your Word [Psalm 119:105; 2 Timothy 3:15-17]. I thank You in Jesus's name. Amen.

Because this book goes through the New Testament in chronological order, each day's reading includes a number of Bible passages to read. In some cases, they are parallel passages covering the same event (as in the

Gospels). In other cases, each passage covers a different New Testament event in a suggested chronological order. Reading the New Testament in chronological order will help you to see how all the New Testament books relate to each other in the unfolding drama of human redemption.

Because we are covering the entire New Testament in just 90 days, some of the reading assignments may seem a little long. But trust me—you'll be able to read through each day's assignment just fine. Just remember that there are rich spiritual dividends in spending time in God's Word!

I must also tell you that I'll give your thumb a good workout, especially on the chapters dealing with the Gospels' parallel accounts of the same events. Again, however, it will be worth your time and effort—and you might even burn a few extra calories!

Here is what you will find in each chapter.

Introduction. Each chapter that contains the first Scripture reading from a particular New Testament book will contain a brief introduction to that book, including information on the author, readers, and purpose for writing. In the case of the four Gospels, the first four chapters of the book contain one Gospel introduction each.

Overview of Today's Scripture Reading. For each passage, I provide a brief contextual overview that will help you grasp exactly what's going on. This is not a verse-by-verse commentary, but it will help you to see the big picture of the biblical text.

Today's Big Ideas. This section contains a short list of big ideas in the assigned reading, along with Scripture references. This, too, will help you quickly see the big picture.

Insights on Difficult Verses. Hard-to-understand verses are briefly explained.

Major Themes. These are topical summaries of important themes in the text of Scripture.

Digging Deeper with Cross-References. These cross-references will help you discover relevant insights from other Bible verses.

Life Lessons. These are personal, life-changing applications based on what you've read.

Verses to Remember. Here you will find a selection of a few verses

from the assigned reading that are particularly relevant for your spiritual life.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion. The questions here are ideal for either personal reflection or group studies.

Prayer. Each chapter closes with a brief devotional prayer based on the daily reading assignment.

Each of these sections will necessarily be brief. After all, the book has 90 succinct chapters. But the short chapters are strategically designed to give you maximum benefit as you read Scripture and allow it to transform your life. So grab your favorite Bible, and let's begin our journey!

Lord, by the power of Your Spirit, please enable all who read this book to understand and apply important spiritual truths from each New Testament book. Please excite them with Your Word. Please instill in them a sense of awe for the person of our Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation He has provided for each of us. I thank You in Jesus's name. Amen.

Jesus's Incarnation and Early Ministry

DAY 1

Introducing Jesus Christ

We begin our journey through the New Testament with a focus on the Incarnation—that glorious event in which the eternal and divine Son of God became a human being. Begin by reading Matthew 1; Luke 1; 3:23-38; and John 1:1-5. Read with the anticipation that the Holy Spirit has something important to teach you today (see Psalm 119:105).

Chronological marker. Jesus was likely born in 6 BC, so Mary's pregnancy must have been in 7 BC. (The traditional birth date was a miscalculation by scholars about 500 years after Christ's death.)

Introduction to Matthew

Author: Matthew, one of the 12 apostles

Date: written between AD 50 and 60

Fast facts:

- Matthew, himself a Jew, wrote this Gospel to convince Jewish readers that Jesus is the promised Messiah. It contains about 130 Old Testament citations or allusions (for example, see 2:17-18; 4:13-15; 13:35; 21:4-5; 27:9-10).
- Though Matthew was writing to convince Jews that Jesus was the divine Messiah, he does not confine the good news to his own people, the Jews. Rather, he emphasizes that the gospel is for all people.

Key words in Matthew (and the number of times they occur):

Father (44)	righteous (17)
kingdom of heaven (32)	might be fulfilled (15)
kingdom (23)	worship (14)
which was spoken (20)	son of David (10)

(I will provide introductions to the Gospels of Mark, Luke, and John in the next three chapters.)

Overview of Today's Scripture Reading

John 1:1-5. Like Genesis 1, John 1 begins with an emphasis on life and light. Both are rooted in Jesus Christ. Jesus's light shines eternally.

Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38. Jesus's arrival to earth in the Incarnation was not a quickly arranged event that God suddenly brought about. It involved God's sovereign and providential oversight over the messianic line for ages and ages.

Luke 1:1-4. Luke's Gospel is thoroughly researched and reliable.

Luke 1:5-25. God's children often tend to focus more on their own deficiencies and weaknesses than on the awesome power of our sovereign God. That was Zechariah's problem (see verse 18).

Luke 1:26-38. Mary was a God-honoring woman. She humbly submitted to the Lord's will despite the fact that it would bring her sorrow and suffering.

Luke 1:39-56. Notice that there are 15 distinct quotations from the Old Testament in Mary's poem. This shows that the Messiah was born into a home where God's Word was honored.

Matthew 1:18-25. Mary's was not a normal human pregnancy. The Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary to produce a human nature within her womb for Jesus, the eternal Son of God. Jesus was born as a human without a sin nature. He was "God with us."

Luke 1:57-80. John's name means "God is gracious"—appropriate because God graciously sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for the coming of the divine Messiah.

Today's Big Ideas

- Jesus is eternal deity (John 1:1-5).
- Jesus in the Incarnation had a human genealogy (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38).
- The angel Gabriel announced the upcoming birth of Jesus (Luke 1:26-38).

Insights on Difficult Verses

John 1:1-5. Contrary to what some cults claim, these verses prove Jesus is God! The same Greek words used to describe Jesus's deity here are used elsewhere to describe the Father's deity (Luke 20:38; see also John 8:58; 10:30; 20:28).

Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38. Matthew's genealogy traces Joseph's line of descendants and deals with the passing of the legal title to the throne of David. Luke's genealogy traces Mary's lineage and goes all the way back to Adam and the commencement of the human race.

Major Themes

Jesus is the Word (John 1:1). The Word is portrayed as a living, divine being who is eternal, the Creator, and the source of life. John used the term because it was familiar to both Greeks and Jews.

Jesus saves His people (Matthew 1:21). "Jesus" means "the Lord saves" or "the Lord is salvation." It is a perfect name for our Savior.

Digging Deeper with Cross-References

Life is in Jesus (John 1:4)—John 3:15-16; 4:10-14; 5:21-26,39-40; 6:27-40,47-58,63; 7:37-38; 8:12; 10:10,27-28; 11:25-26; 12:49-50; 14:6; 17:2-3; 20:31

Jesus is God (John 1:1)—Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 1:23; Mark 2:5-12; John 8:58; 20:28; Philippians 2:6; Colossians 2:9; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; Revelation 1:8; 22:13,16

Life Lessons

We are responsible to the Creator (John 1:3). John says Jesus is the Creator of all that exists (see Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2). Because we are creatures, we are responsible to submit ourselves to the Creator. Consider making Psalm 95:6-7 and Psalm 100:3 part of the daily fabric of your life.

God uses less-than-perfect people (Matthew 1:3,5-6). Notice that in Jesus's genealogies, less-than-perfect people are in the messianic line. For example, Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba were all involved in sexual sin (Genesis 38; Joshua 2; 2 Samuel 11:1–12:23). Yet all three were included in God's unfolding plan of salvation. God often does amazing things through people whom the world considers less than desirable (see 1 Corinthians 1:26-30).

Verses to Remember

- “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).
- “The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus’” (Luke 1:30-31).

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Why do you think John established the absolute deity of Christ at the very beginning of his Gospel (John 1:1)?
2. Does the fact that Jesus's name means “the Lord saves” cause you to look at Him any differently?
3. Have you ever thought about what might have happened had the Incarnation of Jesus never occurred?

My Father, how thankful I am that You sent Jesus into the world. As I ponder the meaning of His name—“the Lord saves”—I am filled with gratitude at the salvation I have in Him. May You ever be praised. In Jesus's name, amen.

DAY 2

Jesus's Boyhood

Yesterday we focused on the Incarnation—that glorious event in which the eternal and divine Son of God became a human being (Matthew 1; Luke 1; 3:23-38; John 1:1-5). Today we turn our attention to the circumstances surrounding the boyhood of Jesus.

Begin by reading Matthew 2 and Luke 2. As you read, remember that the Word of God is alive and working in you (Hebrews 4:12).

Chronological marker. Jesus was born in 6 BC, so His growth as a boy would have taken up till around AD 7. Two decades then passed. He grew into adulthood and began His ministry around AD 27.

Introduction to Luke

Author: Luke was a frequent companion of the apostle Paul.

Date: written in AD 60

Fast facts:

- Luke was a well-educated and cultured man.
- He wrote his Gospel based on reliable, firsthand sources (Luke 1:1-4).
- Luke, a medical doctor, expressed unflinching belief in Jesus's virgin birth (Luke 1:35) and many miracles (4:38-40; 5:15-25; 6:17-19; 7:11-15).

Key words in Luke (and the number of times they occur):

save (19)

grace (8)

sin/sinner (18)

salvation (6)

preach glad tidings/good

news (10)

Overview of Today's Scripture Reading

Luke 2:1-20. In stark contrast to Jesus's intrinsic glory and majesty, He was born in lowly conditions in a stable. Angels then appeared to shepherds in a field, announcing that "Christ the Lord" was born, not "Christ *your* Lord." Christ is sovereign over angels as well as humans.

Luke 2:21-38. When Jesus was presented in the temple by His parents, Simeon—a God-fearing man—recognized the babe as the One who would bring salvation to the world. Though Jesus wouldn't begin His public ministry for 30 years, Simeon knew this was the Christ, the Messiah. Now that he had witnessed the Savior, Simeon said he was ready to die peacefully.

Mary, Joseph, Jesus, and Simeon were then approached by the prophetess Anna. She had apparently been long awaiting the coming of the Messiah. When she heard Simeon speak, her spirit rejoiced, and she gave thanks to God.

Matthew 2; Luke 2:39-40. Back in Nazareth, Jesus was soon visited by Magi from the east. They followed a "star" to His house. When they beheld Jesus, they worshipped Him, presenting Him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These gifts were typically given to a king in biblical times.

Herod, meanwhile, was threatened with the possible prospect of a challenging king. He engaged in a failed plot to murder Jesus. There were many collateral casualties in this satanically driven plot (Revelation 12:4).

Luke 2:41-52. When Jesus was 12 years old, He accompanied His parents to Jerusalem to observe the Passover. While returning to Jerusalem, Joseph and Mary discovered that Jesus was missing. Families often traveled with other families in a caravan for safety purposes. Joseph and Mary apparently assumed Jesus was with other kids in the caravan. In reality, Jesus was still in Jerusalem, amazing learned interpreters of Scripture.

Today's Big Ideas

- Angels announced Christ's birth to some shepherds (Luke 2:1-20).

- Jesus was presented at the Jewish temple, where He was recognized as the Savior (Luke 2:21-38).
- Jesus was worshipped by wise men but hunted by Herod (Matthew 2; Luke 2:39-40).

Insights on Difficult Verses

Matthew 2:1-12. The fact that the Magi observed the unique star does not condone astrology, as some have claimed. This star existed to announce Christ's birth, not to foretell an event. Stars in the Bible point to God's glory (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:18-20).

Matthew 2:23. No Old Testament verse calls Jesus a Nazarene. Nazareth was viewed as a city of vice, so being called a Nazarene was considered scornful. Matthew's point was that the prophets collectively foretold that Jesus would be a despised character (Psalm 69:8,20-21; Isaiah 11:1; 49:7; 53:2-8).

Major Themes

The kingship of Jesus (Matthew 2:2). Scripture reveals that the Messiah would reign as King (Genesis 49:10), have a dynasty (2 Samuel 7:16), and have everlasting dominion (Daniel 7:13-14).

The star of Bethlehem (Matthew 2:2). A normal star in interstellar space would be incapable of leading the wise men to an individual dwelling in Bethlehem. The "star" was likely a manifestation of God's Shekinah glory hovering in the atmosphere.

Digging Deeper with Cross-References

The necessity of Christ's birth as a human (Luke 2:7)—Luke 1:31-33; John 1:18; 1 Peter 2:21; Hebrews 5:1-2; 10:1-10; 1 John 3:8

Jesus, the divine shepherd (Matthew 2:6)—John 10:11; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; see also Psalms 23; 78:52; Isaiah 40:11; Mark 14:27; Revelation 7:17

Life Lessons

Beware of selfishness, pride, and insecurity (Matthew 2:16-18). Herod was driven to horrific sin by these vices, and Christians must be on guard against them. It is much better to be self-giving and humble (1 Corinthians 10:24; 2 Corinthians 5:15; Galatians 6:2; Philippians 2:4).

Worship (Matthew 2:11). When the Magi saw Jesus, they “fell down and worshiped him.” Falling down and worshipping Jesus will still be a common activity in heaven (Revelation 5:8,14; 19:4). Why not get into the habit now?

Verses to Remember

- “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11).
- “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52).

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Why do you think God allowed Jesus to be born in humble circumstances instead of an environment fit for royalty?
2. Why do you think angels announced Christ’s birth to shepherds and not to royalty or governmental officials?
3. What do you learn in Luke 2 about the nature of the good news announced by the angels?

My Father, truly the gospel of Jesus Christ is “good news of great joy.” Like the wise men, I rejoice “exceedingly with great joy.” I worship my Savior, “who is Christ the Lord.” Praise be to Him. In His glorious name, amen.