

THE LIFE AND
WORDS OF
JESUS

READ THE WORDS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

Guide notes, introduction and close written by
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Introduction

What you are about to read are the most significant words ever written down. No other life has had a bigger impact on the world than that of Jesus Christ. Not only does our dating system pivot on Jesus' life, but most of the values that undergird our society derive from his teaching. No other document has been translated into as many languages as these accounts; not even close (look it up!). Jesus is not 'eastern' or 'western'; he has found a home in the hearts of all people in all cultures. There is barely a corner of our globe where Jesus is not known and honoured. People of all religions, moreover, recognise Jesus as an important bearer of truth in some sense. And the movement that bears his name, the Christian church, is the largest religious movement in the world.

Jesus also has deep and ancient roots. He did not spring up out of nowhere. He is the fulfilment of thousands of years of expectation and the culmination of an enduring divine plan recorded in the collection of books we call 'The Bible'. Jesus embodies everything that the rest of the Bible teaches and even, in a very mysterious sense, God himself. Jesus came to show us who God is and to reconcile us to him. Jesus enables us to live as God's children and to be part of God's family.

This book is a compilation of selected sections of the four primary biographical accounts of Jesus' life and teaching called 'the Gospels.' They are named after their authors: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Included here also are some sections from 'The Acts of the Apostles' (usually referred to just as 'Acts') also written by Luke as a sequel to his gospel. These texts were written by the very people who directly experienced these things, and, from the earliest days, they were

universally accepted as accurate and authoritative. The purpose of this compilation is to provide you with an introductory selection of readings from the original accounts usually contained in 'The New Testament' of the Bible.

The Story of the Bible so far

The Bible begins by introducing God as the creator of the universe and human beings as God's children. The earth was given to us as our home where we were to enjoy God and his goodness together. But human beings rejected God, they were unwilling to trust God and wanted to live their lives *their* way. And so began a downward spiral that we refer to as the fall of humanity. The rest, as they say, is history. We rejected God in a bid for autonomy, power and control, which naturally put us into conflict with each other. So, history has been characterised by a cycle of violence, oppression and exploitation. The world is still full of the goodness of God, but people routinely use good things in bad ways. Now that's the bad news.

But there is good news, and that's what the Bible focuses on. God has a plan to save humanity, a plan that has been unfolding slowly over thousands of years. God called a man and a woman, Abraham and Sarah, to walk with him. Through them he raised up a people, the Israelites, to walk with him. And through the Israelites God would teach the world to walk with him. But there was a problem. These people who God called to walk with him, kept going astray. God was faithful to them, but they were constantly unfaithful to him. They kept rejecting God and going their own way, just as the first humans did. Humanity needed help. We needed a saviour.

We often don't recognise a solution until we feel the full force of the problem. As the need became more glaring, so God began to reveal the solution. Various prophets over hundreds of years spoke of a time when God would come to us in the person of an 'Anointed One' (Hebrew: *Messiah*. Greek: *Christ*), a Divine Saviour King, to do three things: First the Messiah/Christ would, in a supreme divine act of sacrifice, absorb in himself all the guilt of humanity and return forgiveness. In this way humanity could be reconciled with God.

Secondly, he would then come to rule in the hearts of his people by his Spirit to transform us from the inside out. Then thirdly, this Divine Saviour King would restore the whole earth. Here are some of those prophecies (all written down hundreds of years before the coming of Jesus):

Isaiah 9:6-7:

*⁶For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.*

*And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*⁷Of the greatness 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
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.*

Isaiah 53:1-6:

*¹Who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*

*²He 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.*

*³He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.*

⁴ Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

Zechariah 9:9-11:

⁹ Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,
righteous and victorious,
lowly and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

¹⁰ I will take away the chariots from Ephraim
and the warhorses from Jerusalem,
and the battle bow will be broken.
He will proclaim peace to the nations.
His rule will extend from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

¹¹ As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you,
I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.

Joel 2:28-29:

²⁸ "And afterward,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.

²⁹ Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

Ezekiel 36:25-27:

²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Daniel 7:13-14:

¹³ “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. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples 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.

All these prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and they continue to be fulfilled to the present day. In the following readings you will notice the authors continually citing verses from the prophetic writings (which we call the Old Testament). Sometimes they quote explicit predictions and at other times they cite verses that they see as prefiguring the events that they are narrating. The point of it all is this: Jesus is the fulfilment and culmination of a long and deliberate plan of God. That plan of God is still at work in the world and these accounts were written to invite you into it. Welcome to the greatest story ever told!

The Life and Words of Jesus

Prologue

(John 1:1-18)

¹ In the beginning was the Word,^a and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.² He was with God in the beginning. ³ All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John.^b ⁷ He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.

⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognise him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name, ¹³ who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God.

^a Genesis chapter 1 tells us that all things came into existence by the command of God. The 'Word' is God's revelation of himself and his purpose to us, both of which are embodied in the person of Jesus.

^b John the Baptist was a prophet who came as a forerunner to announce the imminent arrival of Jesus.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John testified concerning him and exclaimed, “This was the one of whom I said, ‘The one coming after me ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me.’”) ¹⁶ Indeed, we have all received grace upon grace from his fullness, ¹⁷ for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father’s side — he has revealed him.

THE ANGEL APPEARS TO MARY

(Luke 1:26-38)

²⁶ In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged, to a man named Joseph, of the house of David.^a The virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸ And the angel came to her and said, “Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you.” ²⁹ But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be. ³⁰ Then the angel told her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob^b forever, and his kingdom will have no end.”

³⁴ Mary asked the angel, “How can this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man?”

³⁵ The angel replied to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ And consider your relative

^a David was king of Israel around 1000BC and the one to whom God promised a descendent who would establish an eternal rule of peace.

^b Jacob was also called ‘Israel’. He had 12 sons who became the 12 tribes of Israel. Most of the tribes were scattered leaving Judah as the remnant of Israel. The word ‘Jew’ relates to ‘Judah.’

Elizabeth^c — even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called childless.³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.”

³⁸ “See, I am the Lord’s servant,” said Mary. “May it happen to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her.

THE ANGEL APPEARS TO JOSEPH

(Matthew 1:18-25)

¹⁸ The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ So her husband, Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly.

²⁰ But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus,^d because he will save his people from their sins.”

²² Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

*²³ See, the virgin will become pregnant
and give birth to a son,
and they will name him Immanuel,
which is translated “God is with us.”*

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord’s angel had commanded him. He married her ²⁵ but did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son.
And he named him Jesus.

^c Elizabeth was Mary’s cousin. She was barren and now past the age of childbearing. But she and her husband Zechariah were blessed by God to become the parents of John the Baptist.

^d Jesus is the Greek form of *Joshua*, which means *the Lord saves*.