



The Earthly Life of Jesus, the Christ





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The Earthly Life of Jesus, the Christ

*A life in chronological,
geographical and social context*

Robert Duncan Culver

Mentor





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Introduction



The Lord Himself, during the last hours He spent with His disciples, delivered for the ages His own very succinct sketch of His earthly career: 'I came forth from the Father,' He said, 'and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father' (John 16:28)-*from the Father*, the first stage; *to the Father*, the last; with *come into the world* and *leave the world* between. Albrecht Bengel called this verse the 'greatest recapitulation' of Jesus' career among men.¹ H. A. W. Meyer observed that this remarkable statement of Jesus is 'a simple and grand summary of His entire personal life.'²

In a distinctly observable manner, not only the entire Gospel of John (who alone reports this saying) but the whole corpus of the synoptic Gospels – Mark, Matthew, and Luke – is fully amenable to understanding under the rubrics of this fourfold structure. It is the outline of the present book.

Recent generations have produced a flood of literature – scholarly, pseudoscholarly, journalistic, fictional and otherwise – about almost every conceivable aspect of Jesus' person, career, message, and mission.

1 *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*, 2 vols. (Tubingae, 1850), 2:458.

2 *Critical and Exegetical Hand-book of the Gospel of John* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), p. 455.



THE EARTHLY CAREER OF JESUS, THE CHRIST



Some authors have presupposed that the genuine Jesus, the true prophet of Galilee, and His disciples must be sought in a reconstructed arrangement of the Gospel materials, employing archaeology, comparative religion, modern literary criticism, and other modern tools, insights, and techniques. Others have deliberately and openly sought to produce entertaining fiction, using the Jesus of the Gospel story as the main or a subordinate character. A smaller but significant number of sober men have treated the stories of Jesus, His disciples, and His detractors from the standpoint of devotion. Still others have sought to sketch out (some briefly, some fully) the actual historical data of the Gospels, producing a consecutive record of the career of Jesus of Nazareth that uses the Gospels as normative and modern discoveries and researches as supplementary. The goal is a systematically organized aggregate of all we know about His life here on this planet. This approach accepts the first three Gospels as both truthful and actually 'synoptic,' i.e., they go over essentially the same ground from slightly different points of view and with different emphases. The questions of mutual dependence or independence of the three, while not irrelevant, are not of prime importance here. This approach, adopted herein and followed by many older works and a sprinkling of recent ones, accepts the Fourth Gospel as a genuine late first-century document, probably Johannine, and consciously supplemental to the three Synoptics.

I have not treated every incident or journey in detail, nor interpreted every parable, nor sought to solve every problem or resolve all apparent discrepancies of the narratives. I have sought to include in the book plan every incident, every parable (or group of parables), and every sermon and miracle, while reserving for extended treatment a small number of typical examples. I have furnished sufficient of the journeys, incidents, teachings, parables, sayings, and climactic events of the Gospel records so that the reader can fit all into a tentative narrative scheme. For example, although not all of Jesus' conversations are discussed, His fascinating interview with that vital and intelligent 'woman at the well' of Sychar is presented in detail. Further, though many supposed discrepancies are left for the large commentaries to handle, the very typical and often noticed difficulties connected with our Lord's last passage through Jericho are discussed in a manner suggesting how all the others might be handled.

The discourses could not all be summarized in a relatively short work. The order and the geographical and chronological location of each, however, are noted, together with the tone, tenor, rising crescendo,



THE PREPARATION FOR HIS COMING

and essential content of each.

My purpose is so to treat the accounts that the reader who consults his Bible as he reads, will obtain a substantial, interpreted summary of our Lord's career, seen in chronological and geographical context. We hope the student will be supported in the conviction that Jesus' career can only be explained as it was by those interesting villagers of Sychar whom He blessed with His presence and ministry as an honored guest for two days: 'We have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.'

The value of the approach followed here was well put by an older author whose well-known 'life' of Christ I will cite often: '... if the elements of time and place are stricken from the Gospels, the Lord's life ceases to be a truly human and intelligible one; He becomes only a wandering Voice. The more fully we know the outward circumstances of His life, and His relations to those around Him, the more do His words gain in significance, and attest His discernment and wisdom. Thus it is of importance to know, so far as we are able, both the times and places of His utterances; and the labor spent in this study is not idle, but will yield rich reward.'³



³ ALOL, p. vii.







List of Abbreviations

- ALOL Andrews, Samuel J. *The Life of Our Lord upon the Earth*. Rev. ed. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891.
- ANT Alford, Henry. *The New Testament for English Readers*. 2 vols. London: Rivingtons, 1863-1866. Reprinted Chicago: Moody, n.d.
- BA *The Biblical Archaeologist*.
- BASOR *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*.
- BGB Baly, Denis. *The Geography of the Bible*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957.
- BGHSB Burton, Ernest D., and Goodspeed, Edgar J. *A Harmony of the Synoptic Gospels in Greek*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1947.
- CLC Cheney, Johnson M. *The Life of Christ in Stereo: The Four Gospels Combined as One*. Portland, Oreg.: Western Baptist Seminary, 1969.
- EHL Ellicott, C. J. *Historical Lectures on the Life of Our Lord*. London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1862.
- ELTJM Edersheim, Alfred. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. 2 vols. New York: Longmans, Green, 1907.
- FANT Finegan, Jack. *The Archaeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church*. Princeton: Princeton University, 1969.
- FHBC Finegan, Jack. *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*. Princeton: Princeton University, 1964.
- FLAP Finegan, Jack. *Light from the Ancient Past: The Archaeological Background of Judaism and Christianity*. 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University, 1974.
- GCTNT Gregory, C. R. *The Canon and Text of the New Testament*. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1907.
- GJM Guthrie, Donald. *Jesus the Messiah*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972.
- GSLC Guthrie, Donald. *A Shorter Life of Christ*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970.

- HDB Hastings, James, ed. *Dictionary of the Bible*. 5 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898-1904.
- HWWJ Hunter, Archibald M. *The Work and Words of Jesus*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950.
- JFBC Jamieson, Robert; Fausset, A. R.; and Brown, David. *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. 2 vols. Hartford: S. S. Scranton, n.d.
- KBA Kraeling, Emil G. *Rand McNally Bible Atlas*. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1962.
- RELJ Robertson, A. T. *Epochs in the Life of Jesus*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.
- RHFG Robinson, Edward. *A Harmony of the Four Gospels in English*. Rev. ed. Revised by Edward Robinson and M. B. Riddle. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1890.
- RHG Robertson, A. T. *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ*. New York: Doran, 1922.
- RHS Reid, John Calvin, compiler. *His Story*. Waco, Tex.: Word, n.d.
- SBCNT Strack, Hermann L., and Billerbeck, Paul. *Commentarzum Neuen Testament aus Talmud and Midrasch*. 6 vols. Muenchen: C. H. Beck, 1919.
- SDB Smith, William. *Dictionary of the Bible*. Rev. ed. Revised and edited by H. B. Hackett and Ezra Abbot. New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1875.
- SDHF Smith, David. *The Days of His Flesh: The Earthly Life of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*. 8th ed. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910.
- SGG Scroggie, W. Graham. *A Guide to the Gospels*. London: Pickering and Inglis, 1948.
- SHJP Schuerer, Emil. *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*. 5 vols. Translated by John Macpherson. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891.
- SLC Stalker, James. *The Life of Jesus Christ*. Chicago: Henry A. Sumner, 1881. Reprinted-Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1949.
- VIG Vilnay, Zev. *Israel Guide*. 3rd ed. Jerusalem: Shiever, 1960.
- WFHAB Wright, George Ernest, and Filson, Floyd Vivian. *The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956.



Part I

'I came forth from the Father'

