

Part 3

Jesus and the Gospels

The Life of Jesus of Nazareth

An Overview

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Jesus of Nazareth is not just *the* central figure of the New Testament, he is its *sine qua non*. A proper overview, then, of the life of Jesus would require considerable space; a detailed account of his life would fill more books than “the world itself could . . . contain,” as the testimony of the Beloved Disciple states (John 21:25). However, in a volume like this we must be content with a survey of the most important events, starting at the beginning and agreeing that some matters deserve more attention than others. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke begin with announcement and birth narratives. John’s Gospel takes readers back to the premortal existence when Jesus was the firstborn spirit son of a divine father (see Doctrine and Covenants 93:21), which is the only proper way to truly comprehend the significance of Jesus’s mortal life.¹

The prologue to John’s Gospel (John 1:1–18) begins by declaring that the premortal Jesus was the “Word” (Greek *logos*). One definition of “the Word” is “messenger of salvation” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:8), the agent of God the Father, the one who put into effect all the terms and conditions of the Father’s plan. This harmonizes well with the concept of *logos*. In our present language words act as a messenger between individuals. Similarly, Jesus Christ acts as the mediator, medium, or messenger of his Father. Jesus’s life and teachings are the perfect expression of the Eternal Father’s mind and will.²

In John 1:1, John implies, though does not explicitly state, that the premortal Jesus was Jehovah, the Great I Am, come to earth.³ John merely says that “the Word was with God and the Word *was* God” (emphasis added). However, John knew as a Jew that there was no

other way to take his assertion than that Jesus was Jehovah—the one true God of Israelite religion (Deuteronomy 6:4). The terms *Jehovah* (Exodus 6:3) and *I Am* (Exodus 3:13–15) are related, the first derived from the verb “to become, to bring into being” and the second from the associated verb “to be, to exist.”⁴ Thus, the premortal Jesus of Nazareth was the eternally existing God of Israel.

According to John, the premortal Jesus was also the maker of “all things” (1:3). Latter-day revelation confirms John’s witness with greater detail, explaining that Jesus Christ “created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are” (3 Nephi 9:15), as well as “millions of earths like this [one]” (Moses 7:30). But even more spectacular than his infinite creative power is his infinite redemptive power—he is able to save all that he creates (Doctrine and Covenants 76:42).

With the birth of Jesus, God himself physically entered history—the “Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to eternity, [came] down from heaven among the children of men, and [dwelt] in a tabernacle of clay” (Mosiah 3:5). This is known in Latter-day Saint theology as the “condescension of God” (1 Nephi 11:26–33).

John the Baptist

Luke reports that the announcement of the Advent was preceded six months earlier by the angel Gabriel’s announcement to Zacharias that the son his wife, Elizabeth, would deliver in her old age, John the Baptist, would be an Elias⁵—a servant who would prepare the way for the coming of the awaited Messiah (1:16–17). All of the Gospels indicate that this is exactly what John did once he reached maturity⁶—“preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Luke 3:3), quoting Isaiah 40:3 (“prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,” Matthew 3:3), and boldly declaring to the religious leaders of his day that his baptisms by water were a foreshadowing of the baptisms by fire and the Holy Ghost to be performed by Jesus, “who coming after me is preferred before me” (John 1:27; compare Luke 3:16).

A significant aspect of John’s ministry of preparation appears to have been the training of future disciples of Jesus. So powerful a teacher was John that during his ministry he gathered followers or disciples who called him “Rabbi” (John 3:26), literally “my great one” or “my master.” John taught these disciples to look ultimately for the Messiah and then urged them to transfer their allegiance from himself to Jesus (Matthew 11:1–5). He knew he was sent to prepare Jesus’s disciples and said to them, “He [Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

Some of those who were first disciples of John and later of Jesus became members of the original Twelve. Andrew, the brother of Peter, is specifically mentioned by name and shown to have influenced his brother: “Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! . . . One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first

findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ” (John 1:35–41).⁷

We are not sure how many of the original twelve were first disciples of John the Baptist, but a statement attributed to Peter, the chief apostle, has been seen to imply that several, if not all, were initially followers of John the Baptist and trained by him. After Judas Iscariot’s death, Peter met with 120 disciples and instructed them that a replacement for the vacancy in the quorum of the twelve must be filled according to special criteria, including having been with the original twelve from the time of John’s baptism onward (Acts 1:21–22).⁸

It would be impossible to understand the ministry of Jesus or his early church, as depicted in the New Testament, without understanding John the Baptist. So powerful and long-lasting was John’s influence in Judaism of Jesus’s and Paul’s day that it was still being felt many years after his death (Acts 19:2–5).

Mary and Joseph in Nazareth

Luke states that Mary was a virgin living in Nazareth of the Galilee at the time of Gabriel’s announcement of her impending conception (1:26). The Book of Mormon prophet Nephi adds that she was “exceedingly fair” (1 Nephi 11:13). The word *fair* in the King James Old Testament is primarily translated from one of two Hebrew terms: *tov* (“good,” meaning “good to look at,” as in Genesis 6:2) or *yapheh* (“beautiful”). The tradition of Mary’s physical beauty became well established in early Christianity and persisted.⁹

Nazareth was small and insignificant biblically, the only major Christian site not mentioned in the Old Testament, the writings of the historian Josephus, or the Talmud. Archaeologist James F. Strange put the estimated size of Nazareth at under sixty acres, most of which “was empty space in antiquity.” He estimated the population of Nazareth at the time of Jesus to be “a maximum of about 480.”¹⁰ Others think it was even fewer. The statement of one of Jesus’s early disciples summarizes Nazareth’s reputation at the time. When Philip first reported to Nathanael that he and others had “found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write [i.e., the Messiah], Jesus of Nazareth,” Nathanael retorted, “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:45–46). If Jesus “descended below all things” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:6), this might well include the place where he grew up.

That Mary, and subsequently the holy family, lived in poor circumstances is made clear by Luke’s report of the temple offering made by Mary and Joseph when Jesus was presented in the temple at forty days of age (2:22–24). As provided by the Mosaic law, the poor who could not afford a larger animal for the sacrificial offering could give a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons (Leviticus 1:14; 5:7; 12:8).

Mary and Joseph Betrothed

Mary’s faith and courage are demonstrated by her response to the divine announcement of her forthcoming motherhood: “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour” (Luke 1:46–47). This personal hymn of praise (verses 46–55, known as

the Magnificat) is one of four such hymns preserved in Luke 1–2.¹¹ Indeed, we cannot even imagine what Mary learned about God, his majesty, glory, and personality, about the wonder of new life, conception, birth, and motherhood.

Mary was espoused, or betrothed, to Joseph at the time of her conception (Matthew 1:18), a circumstance much more binding than modern engagement to be married. Marriage customs in New Testament times derived from Mosaic laws and practices, exemplified in the Old Testament. Marriage between a young man and a young woman was typically arranged and agreed on between heads of the respective families.¹² Negotiations focused on, but were not limited to, the size of the *mohar* (the “bride price”; see Genesis 34:12; Exodus 22:17; 1 Samuel 18:25). Once the marriage was agreed on, the wedding consisted of two stages: betrothal and a separate celebration. Betrothal was legally and religiously more significant than the subsequent celebration, after which cohabitation actually began. Betrothal was regarded as finalization of a solemn agreement. It carried the force of a covenant to be honored between God-fearing parties (Genesis 2:24; Ezekiel 16:8; Ephesians 5:21–33). Legal action was required to dissolve a betrothal (Deuteronomy 24:1). Mosaic law also recognized the changed status of a man after betrothal by excusing him from military service until after the wedding celebration (Deuteronomy 20:7).

Though betrothed couples were regarded as husband and wife legally (Deuteronomy 22:23–24), between the time of betrothal and the celebration that inaugurated cohabitation, a strict code of chastity was enforced (Matthew 1:18, 25). At the time of betrothal the young man took legal, but not physical, possession of the young woman. Nonetheless, Mosaic law still referred to the woman as a wife, and unfaithfulness during the period of betrothal (espousal) could be punished by death (Deuteronomy 22:23–24).

Joseph’s Righteousness

Thus, when Mary was found to be pregnant after a three-month visit to her relative Elizabeth (Luke 1:56; Matthew 1:18), Joseph did not want to have Mary stoned or exposed to public disgrace and therefore determined to divorce her quietly by signing the necessary legal document, called in Hebrew a *sefer keritut* (Deuteronomy 24:1), later called a *get*.¹³ Only after the test of his character was he instructed in a dream by an angel to complete the marriage process.

As a result of Jesus’s extraordinary conception, the idea of illegitimacy was perpetuated by uninformed sources and caused both Mary’s and Jesus’s reputations to suffer (and probably Joseph’s) throughout their lives. Respected Roman historian Michael Grant wrote that the unusual circumstances surrounding Jesus’s birth “led to subsequent Jewish stories of Jesus’ illegitimacy, which persisted for centuries.”¹⁴ It is possible that we see these charges of illegitimacy surface in John’s Gospel when certain Jews responded to Jesus’s charge of not being the spiritual heirs of Abraham, which he leveled sometime after the Feast of Tabernacles: “They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me . . . : this

did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God” (John 8:39–41).

Birth

The Holy Ghost came upon Mary “to prepare her for admittance into the divine presence,” because “no man or woman can live in mortality and survive the presence of the Highest except by the sustaining power of the Holy Ghost.”¹⁵ Latter-day Saint theology affirms the doctrine of the virgin birth, but not immaculate conception (Alma 7:10).¹⁶ “From Mary, a mortal woman who had never had sexual relations with any man (Luke 1:34), Jesus inherited mortality, including the capacity to die; from God, the immortal Man of Holiness, Jesus inherited immortality, the capacity to live forever. He is the Son of God, and he is God the Son.”¹⁷ John reported Jesus himself testifying that “as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself” (5:26).

Both Matthew and Luke place the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem of Judea, south of Jerusalem. Luke is the only Gospel writer who relates his narrative to specific dates of world history. He says Caesar Augustus (27 BC–AD 14), the first and one of the greatest of the Roman emperors, called for a taxing or census enrollment, which first occurred when Quirinius was Roman governor of Syria (2:1–7). Both assertions of location and time have been called into question by some notable scholars.¹⁸ While Luke’s association of the Roman census with Quirinius may present historical problems,¹⁹ Alma 7:10 points to Bethlehem as the place of the Nativity.

After giving birth, Mary wrapped Jesus in cloths and placed him in a manger “because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7). The Joseph Smith Translation changes *inn* to *inns*. The Greek word *kataluma* can be translated as “inn,” “guest room,” or “room.”²⁰ Some have wondered if Joseph and Mary might have sought lodging with relatives in the area since their family history clearly ties back to King David and his city, Bethlehem (Luke 2:4; 1 Samuel 16:1, 11–12), and it is possible to translate Luke 2:7 as “laid him in a manger because they had no space in the room(s).” But Luke does not tell readers where, precisely, the birth occurred. Second-century-AD Christian apologist Justin Martyr states: “Since Joseph had nowhere to lodge [*katalyein*] in that village, he lodged in a certain cave near the village; and while they were there, Mary brought forth the Messiah and laid him in a manger, where the magi from Arabia came and found him.”²¹ We note, however, that these magi apparently came later since the family was by that time living in a “house” (Matthew 2:11). In addition, the early church father Origen, who was very familiar with the land of Israel from personal visits, wrote: “If anyone wants further proof to convince him that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, . . . he may observe that in agreement with the story in the Gospel about Jesus’ birth, the cave at Bethlehem is shown where he was born, and the manger in the cave where he was wrapped in strips of cloth.”²²

The traditional site of that cave is inside the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, commissioned in the fourth century by St. Helena, mother of Constantine. The traditional

manger is carved out of stone, and the exact spot of the birth is marked by a fourteen-point silver star, representing the three groupings of fourteen generations in Jesus's genealogy according to Matthew (1:17).

There is tremendous symbolism associated with Bethlehem, a name meaning "house of bread" in Hebrew. It is a fitting location for the Advent of the "Bread of Life" (John 6:35). His birth was attended by angels and later by good shepherds, who were keeping watch over their sheep.

Infancy

In accord with Jewish practice, Jesus was circumcised when eight days old as a sign that identified him as a member of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 17:10–12; compare JST Genesis 17:11–12). Circumcision was itself a symbol of the Lord's greater desire—to circumcise one's heart, meaning to conform to and live according to God's will (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6).

At forty days of age, Jesus was taken to the temple in Jerusalem to be presented to his Father and be redeemed or ransomed according to the Mosaic law (Exodus 13:13; Numbers 18:15). By the Lord's decree, every firstborn son belonged to him (Exodus 13:2; 34:19). This ritual of ransoming was a symbolic reliving of the Passover,²³ where the male child was redeemed from full-time servitude to God by a five-shekel payment (Numbers 3:47–48). Later, the tribe of Levi became the Lord's special possession instead of the firstborn males—but the ransoming ceremony was kept (3:45).

Matthew's Gospel describes the visit of *magi*, "wise men from the east" who followed a star to find the new king of the Jews (Matthew 2:1–2). The term *magi* or *magoi* used in the Greek text of Matthew points to a Persian origin. *Magi* refers to Zoroastrian priests.²⁴ Perhaps these noble visitors were descendants of Jewish priests who were taken to Babylon as part of the exile in 586 BC and subsequently came under Persian rule and culture when Cyrus the Great conquered the region (539 BC), and who stayed there (as the majority of the Jewish exiles did) instead of returning to Judea beginning in 538 BC. It is not hard to see how Jewish priests in the Persian Empire would be categorized with priests of Zoroastrianism under the general rubric *Magi* and make astrology or star watching part of their priestly function. After all, a very early prophecy of the appearance of the Messiah states that "there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel" (Numbers 24:17).

We do not know how many wise men visited the holy family, nor do we know how long after Jesus's birth they arrived. Their visit is backdrop to Herod's treachery,²⁵ followed by dreams of warning given to the wise men and to Joseph, the flight of the holy family to Egypt, the slaughter of the innocents in and around Bethlehem, and the return of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus ultimately to their permanent residence of many years in Nazareth (Matthew 2:12–23). Matthew presents the holy family's physical departure out of Egypt as fulfillment of Hosea 11:1—"I . . . called my son out of Egypt" (compare Matthew 2:15).

Growing to Maturity

We possess scant details of Jesus's maturation and young adult years from canonical sources. The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible provides an important note:

And it came to pass that Jesus grew up with his brethren, and waxed strong, and waited upon the Lord for the time of his ministry to come. And he served under his father, and he spake not as other men, neither could he be taught; for he needed not that any man should teach him. And after many years, the hour of his ministry drew nigh. (JST Matthew 3:24–26)

There exists a genre of apocryphal stories about Jesus's boyhood called "hidden life" stories, which are found in noncanonical sources like the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, "which recounts 'the mighty childhood deeds of our Lord Jesus Christ,' between ages five to twelve."²⁶

Luke's report of Jesus's appearance at the Jerusalem temple when twelve years old serves as a bridge between his infancy and public ministry accounts.²⁷ In the temple precinct we see Jesus as a prodigy, teaching and answering questions from the doctors of the law, who were astonished at his insights (JST Luke 2:46–47). Among the Jews of the rabbinic period, such a performance would fit the ideal model of the rabbinic prodigy or scholar-genius—the *ilui* or enlightened one.²⁸ But as is made clear by Luke, Jesus was not a genius, not a rabbinic prodigy. He was, and he *knew* he was by age twelve, the literal Son of God the Father (2:49). In Luke's account we also learn that Jesus was well rounded in his development—in wisdom, stature, favor with God, and favor with man, or in other words, intellectually, physically, spiritually, and socially (2:52).

Opening Events of Jesus's Public Ministry

The Gospel of Mark introduces his account of the earthly ministry of Jesus of Nazareth by using the Greek word *euangelion*, "good news" or "good tidings," translated as "gospel" in the King James Version: "The beginning of the gospel [good news] of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). This closely parallels a Roman proclamation dated to around 9 BC that speaks of the birth of Caesar Augustus (emperor from 27 BC to AD 14) as "the beginning of good tidings for the world."²⁹ One gets the sense that Mark was trying to persuade Roman audiences that Jesus is the real ruler and bearer of good tidings.

Luke associates the beginning of Jesus's public ministry with his baptism:

Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased. *And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age,* being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli." (3:21–23; emphasis added)³⁰

The doctrinal significance of Jesus's baptism is powerfully described in the Book of Mormon, particularly in 2 Nephi 31. But several years after Jesus's mortal ministry, the apostle Paul reminded disciples in equally powerful terms of baptism's symbolic link to Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3–6). In a way, Jesus's own baptism was a reminder to him of his ultimate purpose in mortality—the atoning sacrifice.

Luke's mention of Jesus being about thirty years old has reference to the legal age of maturity in Jewish society (Luke 3:23), the age at which Aaronic priests completed their five-year apprenticelike preparation and fully entered into their ministerial responsibilities in the tabernacle and, later, the temple (Numbers 4:3, 47; 8:24). A famous section of the Mishnah *Pirque Aboth* 5:24, outlines the various phases a man's life should follow: "At five years the age is reached for the study of Bible, at ten for the study of Mishnah, at thirteen for the fulfillment of the commandments, at fifteen for the study of Talmud, at eighteen for marriage, at twenty for seeking a livelihood, at thirty for full strength."³¹ Age thirty was thus generally recognized as the time when one moved from preparation to full engagement with one's life's work.

The statement from *Pirque Aboth* naturally raises a question about Jesus's marital status. The scriptures say nothing about it. It is obvious, however, that Jewish religion and culture commended marriage and family life to one and all and looked with disfavor upon normal adult unmarried men. For example, Mishnah tractate Kiddushin 4:13 stipulates that "an unmarried man may not be a teacher of children."

Temptations

Immediately after his baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to commune with his Father (JST Matthew 4:1; Mark 1:12). The location of this special communion was the wilderness of Judah, on the western side of the Dead Sea.³² After Jesus had been with his Father and fasted forty days, he was naturally hungry. Satan used this juncture of vulnerability to attack and tempt Jesus—to get him to use his power to satisfy personal appetites, to appeal to his vanity, and ultimately to obey someone other than his Father. The key phrases each begin with the proposition "if" (Matthew 4:3, 6, 9). This same tactic would be used in the last hours of Jesus's mortal life on the cross when the rulers of the people and the Roman soldiers goaded Jesus: "He saved others; let him save himself, *if* he be Christ. . . . And the soldiers . . . saying, *If* thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself" (Luke 23:35–37; emphasis added). The temptations leveled at Jesus—to use his power for personal gratification rather than advancing God's will and to submit to the will of the adversary—affect all disciples and get at the heart of whom we submit to, whom we worship, who we are, and *whose* we are. In each circumstance Jesus responded to Satan by quoting scripture (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10).

The significant change of JST Matthew 4:1 regarding Jesus's original reason for being in the wilderness ("to be with God" versus the KJV, "to be tempted of the devil") is exceptionally enlightening and helps to answer the question raised by scholars about whether the "wilderness" in this context is to be viewed negatively or positively: "Is it to be understood

negatively as a place of demons (compare 1QM 1) where creation has been cursed (Isaiah 13:19–22; Ezekiel 34:25; Luke 11:24–28) or positively as a place restored to a new creation by the coming of the messianic age (Isaiah 11:6–9; 32:14–20; 40:3; 65:25; Hosea 2:18; compare the pre-Fall paradise of Genesis 1:26–28)?³³

The reading of the Joseph Smith Translation shows that the Holy Ghost did not purposely lead Jesus to the devil to be tempted. Rather, the Holy Ghost led Jesus to the Father, to a higher spiritual environment, which is one of the purposes of the Holy Ghost.³⁴ The wilderness experience foreshadows the Millennium and harks back to the paradise of Eden. A hallmark of the earth's paradisiacal condition was the presence of God, and that was the environment of Jesus's forty-day wilderness sojourn. The whole earth will return to that state at the second coming of Christ.³⁵

At some point early in his ministry, Jesus started to extend initial calls to specific individuals to transfer their allegiance from John the forerunner to himself, to become his disciples, and to join him in the work of his messianic ministry. John's record indicates this began the day after Jesus's baptism when John identified Jesus as the Messiah, the Lamb of God, to his own disciples. On this occasion Jesus gave Peter a new name, *Kepha* in Aramaic, *Petros* or Peter in Greek (John 1:35–42). The Joseph Smith Translation interprets Simon's new name as "a seer or a stone"—perhaps intending for us to think metaphorically of "seer stone" and thus of one who would receive revelation for the post-Resurrection church. John then reports that the next day Jesus headed north to the Galilee where Philip and Nathanael formally became disciples when Jesus demonstrated his powers of seership in calling Nathanael (John 1:43–51). John's Gospel does not take into account Jesus's forty-day fast and subsequent temptation. Thus, with our present state of information, it is not possible to lay out the exact chronology of Jesus's early ministry and harmonize the Gospels with certainty.

In Galilee

Back in the Galilee at the beginning of his public ministry, in the village of Cana, Jesus performed the first of many recorded miracles—the turning of water into wine at a wedding celebration (John 2:1–11). Jesus and at least five of his new followers who had accepted the invitation to discipleship were "called" to attend a marriage (2:2). It appears from the role his mother occupied that it was a member of Jesus's family who was being married, as she had responsibility to provide refreshment for the guests. Jesus accommodated his mother's request for more wine by producing more than one hundred gallons (2:6).³⁶

The significance of this miracle is manifold. The episode shows that Jesus was no social recluse: He participated in a marriage feast. He was obedient to his mother's wishes to make more wine in order to make people happy. He performed the miracle to teach his disciples about his power and strengthen their faith in him (John 2:11). He foreshadowed the Atonement: just as the best wine (symbolic of his blood) came at the end of the feast (2:10), so his greatest sacrifice came at the end of his ministry. He also taught the concept of timing by declaring his "hour [had] not yet come" (2:4), meaning that the time to openly and grandly

proclaim his messianic kingship had not yet come. He did not want to preempt the time needed to perform all those events that needed to be accomplished before an announcement stirred up tremendous and irreversible controversy.

In Jerusalem with Nicodemus

Jesus left the Galilee for Jerusalem to attend Passover—the first of his public ministry (John 2:13–25). John reports that on this occasion Jesus cleansed the temple, attempting to reinstitute some semblance of reverence and order. The area of his activity centered around those locales in the temple precinct where the money changers and animal merchants had permission to pursue their ventures—the Court of the Gentiles and Solomon’s porch—and not the temple itself. It is striking, from the perspective of hindsight, that in his rebuke Jesus refers to the temple as “my Father’s house” (2:16). Later, during the last week of his life, he cleansed the temple again, but this time referred to it as “my house” (Matthew 21:12–13). And a few days after that, while in the temple precinct just before he delivered the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24), he referred to it as “your house”—“your house is left unto you desolate” (23:38). We see a progressive distancing of the temple from God the Father.

While in Jerusalem at this juncture, Jesus had a nighttime encounter with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews (John 3:1).³⁷ Jesus taught him a key doctrine of the kingdom of God: spiritual rebirth and the necessity of baptism and receipt of the gift of the Holy Ghost (3:3–8). In John’s account of this episode we learn important things about Jesus—he was called “Rabbi,” known as a teacher come from God, recognized as a miracle-worker, and linked with godly righteousness in the minds of at least some Jewish leaders. That Nicodemus became a profound disciple is seen in two subsequent events reported by John: Nicodemus’s defense of Jesus in front of his Pharisaic colleagues (7:50–51) and his help with the burial of Jesus’s body after the Crucifixion (19:39–42). Nicodemus is identified forever after his nighttime encounter with Jesus as he who came to Jesus by night (7:50; 19:39).

During this time, as the Synoptic Gospels report, John the Baptist was imprisoned by Herod Antipas. Josephus placed this incarceration at the fortress of Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea.³⁸ Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, was tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (Luke 3:19–20). John had been testifying powerfully of Jesus as well as baptizing. Again, we are struck by his complete absence of self-importance, pride, and self-interest, as well as by his fearless declaration of the truth in the face of Herod’s wicked behavior (Matthew 14:3–5; Mark 6:17–20). It was this courageous pursuit of the truth at all hazards that resulted in John’s beheading.

Return to the Galilee

Jesus left Judea for the Galilee once again, but by taking a route through Samaria. Here he had his famous encounter with the woman at the well (John 4:4–42). The lessons from this episode are powerful. Though he was a Jew, possessing the status of rabbi, he nevertheless spoke directly to a woman who was a Samaritan, thereby abrogating the narrow-minded

social conventions and prejudices of the day. Jesus carefully led the woman to the realization that he was the Messiah, culminating in his powerful self-declaration “I that speak unto thee am he” (4:26).

As a result of the Samaritan woman’s newfound testimony, which she bore to her neighbors, “many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman” (4:39). But then the Samaritans besought Jesus “that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his own word; and said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world” (4:40–42). These verses describe the converting power of a single testimony, the essence of the way the gospel of Jesus Christ spread.

Back in the Galilee, Jesus went to his hometown synagogue, where his messianic witness was rejected by the people, as already noted (Luke 4:16–30). Jesus would be rejected in Nazareth a second time, which caused him amazement on account of the people’s unbelief (Mark 6:1–6). Rejection was a major element of his brief life; even his own half brothers did not believe in him while he lived in mortality (John 7:5). And so he left Nazareth and “came and dwelt in Capernaum”—“his own city” from that time on (Matthew 4:13; 9:1).

Sermon on the Mount

Luke’s accurate chronological sequence of events places the time of the sermon immediately after the choosing of the Twelve, when a great multitude of people from Judea, Jerusalem, and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon came to hear Jesus and to be healed of their infirmities (6:17–19).³⁹ Matthew says the sermon was delivered on a “mountain” (5:1; 8:1), while Luke places it on a “plain” (6:17).

It is important for us to understand the intended audience. It was not the multitude in general. Rather, it was Jesus’s disciples—particularly the Twelve Apostles—for whom the sermon was given. Matthew notes that when he saw the multitudes, “he went up into the mountain: and when he was set, *his disciples* came unto him” (Matthew 5:1; emphasis added). As a training session for the apostles, the Sermon on the Mount was multifaceted: it was the keynote address of the restoration of the gospel in Jesus’s day (JST John 1:26–28), describing how the Mosaic law was fulfilled and what was restored or new to the Jews (Matthew 5:17–18, 21–44); it was a discourse on perfection (5:48); it was a description of the characteristics possessed by those who will inherit eternal life (5:3–12)⁴⁰; hence it was a description of Jesus’s own character and attributes and the constitution for a perfect life⁴¹; it was a reintroduction of God the Father (and his nature), whose existence had been obscured in the Judaism of Jesus’s day, to the disciples (6:1–34; 7:7–11); and it was an instructional session on how to teach the Jews, especially the leaders (JST Matthew 7:9–11).

The content Jesus presented in the sermon was noted by people who were also listening, for they “were astonished at his doctrine.” And his method was different from that of other rabbis, “for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matthew

7:28–29). Jesus did not cite precedent nor quote previous teachers and authorities. He was the authority.

Both Matthew and Luke report that when Jesus finished the sermon he headed east to Capernaum, where he performed more miracles, including the healing of the centurion's servant (likely the centurion's own child). Capernaum stood on a branch of an ancient highway called the Via Maris, thus making it an important station between districts from which to collect taxes and house a Roman garrison led by a centurion. Though a Gentile, this centurion was a man of unequaled faith in Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah. In fact, Jesus marveled and said he had "not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Matthew 8:10).

Capernaum became known as a place of miracles. Jesus seems to have performed more miracles in Capernaum than anywhere else. Sadly, in the end it was precisely because of all the miracles witnessed, but without any corresponding repentance (Matthew 11:20), that Jesus leveled harsh judgment against Capernaum and two other towns, Chorazin and Bethsaida. To the inhabitants of Capernaum he declared: "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee" (11:23–24).

Miracles

The miracles Jesus performed constitute a major element of and reason for his messianic ministry.⁴² They are not ancillary to it. The Gospels present several accounts of Jesus's miracles but do not contain many of his own comments about them. However, he said, "I cast out devils by the Spirit of God" (Matthew 12:28) and perform miraculous events "with the finger of God" (Luke 11:20). Apparently, he was self-aware of his unusual power, for he said that he had "done among [the people] the works which none other man did" (John 15:24). And it appears that Jesus regarded his miracles as evidence of his messiahship and divine sonship. When messengers from John the Baptist came to Jesus asking if he were the one they should look for (meaning the Messiah), Jesus responded by curing "many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight" (Luke 7:20–21). He then told the disciples of John that they in turn should go tell the Baptist what things they had seen and heard, namely, "how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached" (7:22).

Indeed, there was an acknowledgement among many of the people who believed on Jesus that he looked like the Messiah precisely because of his miracles, for they asked, "When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?" (John 7:31). Some Jewish leaders also recognized that Jesus's works were extraordinary and could only have been performed by the power of God (3:2; compare 11:47).

The purposes for which Jesus performed miracles tell us much about his ministry and his personality. Perhaps the fundamental reason that Jesus performed miracles was to help

those in need. He saw suffering and was filled with compassion. This godly love, one would argue, was the very essence of his personality. The First Epistle of John declares that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Jesus and his Father are the embodiment of pure, perfect love (Greek, *agape*), translated in the King James Version as “charity” in Paul’s famous instruction to the Corinthian saints on love (1 Corinthians 13). In other words, of all the perfect attributes that make up their personalities and characters, it is love that molds, shapes, informs, mediates, and invigorates the rest.⁴³

Examples of Christ’s compassion abound in the Gospels. At a time when Jesus departed to a desert place to be alone after hearing of John the Baptist’s beheading, he saw a great multitude following him and “was moved with compassion toward them, and . . . healed their sick” (Matthew 14:12–14). He then multiplied five loaves of bread and two fish to feed five thousand men, plus women and children, because they were hungry and he was compassionate. This miracle is recounted in all four Gospels, suggesting its impressive aspects to the disciples and its pivotal nature (Matthew 14:16–21; Mark 6:33–44; Luke 9:11–17; John 6:5–14).

Three times we know of, Jesus brought deceased individuals back to life (the widow’s son in Luke 7:11–18, Jairus’s daughter in Mark 5:35–43, and his friend Lazarus in John 11:1–46). In all three instances the Savior’s compassion is obvious, and it is specifically mentioned in the raising of the widow’s son (Luke 7:13). Perhaps most touching is the tenderness Jesus displayed toward the daughter of Jairus, a scene interestingly interrupted by Jesus healing the woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5:25–34). But when messengers from Jairus’s house came reporting the death of Jairus’s daughter and asking why Jairus was still bothering the Master, he reassured the synagogue ruler, encouraging him to not be afraid but to “only believe” (Mark 5:36). Jesus ignored the commotion outside Jairus’s house as well as the spiritual immaturity of those who “laughed him to scorn” (Mark 5:40). Always the mentor, Jesus took the chief apostles inside the house and restored the twelve-year-old girl to life. But what Jesus said is the focal point of the episode.

Of the four Gospels, Mark preserves the most Aramaic phrases used by Jesus. It does so in Mark 5:41. Though the King James Version interprets Jesus’s declaration, “Talitha cumi,” as “Damsel, I say unto thee, arise,” the phrase could better be rendered as “Little one, get up,”⁴⁴ a great example of the kindness Jesus had for those around him. Jesus was one who not only wept (John 11:35) but also, stirred by a sensitive soul, exuded great tenderness for those for whom he also felt pain.

Jesus demonstrated he had power over physical death and thus foreshadowed his resurrection. He also showed he had concern for healing the soul (making glad those who were devastated by the vicissitudes of life) as well as the physical body (Mark 2:1–12). By performing miracles, Jesus sought to elevate the thoughts of those who benefitted from his power and to cause them to realize their spiritual infirmities and ultimate dependence on Deity (Matthew 21:18–21; Mark 2:1–11). Thus, Jesus sometimes performed miracles to give evidence of his divine mission and power so that truth seekers would believe in him and believers would be strengthened in their faith. His miracles taught his disciples that he was

the creator and master of the elements and forces of nature. He walked on water (Matthew 14:25–26), calmed storms on the Sea of Galilee (Mark 4:35–41), and cast out evil spirits and controlled them at his will (1:23–27; 9:17–29).

On occasion Jesus performed miracles to expose the narrow, contracted, elitist, and self-righteous views of some of the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees he encountered (Mark 3:1–6; Luke 13:10–17; 14:1–6). Therefore, sometimes the miracles Jesus performed made his opponents all the more antagonistic and desirous of killing him for their own selfish purposes (John 11:46–48). He refused to give the Pharisees a sign to prove who he was (Matthew 12:38–39; Mark 8:11–21; Luke 11:16, 29). However, Jesus never performed miracles for selfish purposes; he emphatically refused to turn stones into bread after his lengthy fast (Matthew 4:3–4), and he would not come down from the cross and save himself (Mark 15:29–32).

Parables

As a teacher, Jesus adapted to the situation at hand and used a variety of methods: he appealed to precedent in the scriptures (Matthew 12:1–8); he quoted from the scriptures (John 10:34); he taught forthrightly with authority and usually did not cite secondary sources (Matthew 7:28–29); he candidly corrected error (Matthew 22:29); he used questions, sometimes bargained by means of questions (Luke 10:25–28; Matthew 21:23–27); he sometimes appeared to change the subject (John 8:3–11; Matthew 22:29–33); he posed problems (Matthew 22:41–46); and he used irony, even sarcasm (Matthew 23:15, 27).

Jesus used parables extensively (Matthew 13). At a certain point in his ministry he taught only through parables (Mark 4:34). Great teachers throughout history have used parables—extended metaphors and allegories—to get across their messages. Among the greatest teachers of Israel were the Tannaitic rabbis (roughly AD 10–200), who used stories in their instruction. Jesus of Nazareth was, in part, a product of his culture and time and drew on a somewhat common stock of stories and illustrations as he taught. The codification of Jewish oral tradition and law, the Midrash and Talmud collections, contain many parables and hortatory narratives involving sowing, harvesting, farming, building, stewards, landlords, tenants, and peasants. There are rabbinic stories of hidden treasure, a Pharisee and a publican, a prodigal son, a feast given to the poor but meant for others, and so on. In short, many of the stories told by Jesus were familiar to the great Jewish teachers of that period, but their uniqueness came in the way Jesus used them. As one author put it, Jesus did not invent the form of teaching known as parables, nor even the specific components of the stories, but under his transforming touch, the water of the parables, as it were, became the richest wine.⁴⁵

Many of these parables were delivered in the Galilee. This is the setting for Matthew 13, which records more parables than does any other single chapter of scripture. When Jesus was sitting by the Sea of Galilee one day, great multitudes gathered around him “so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And he spake many things unto them in parables” (13:2–3). Based on interpretive commentary by Joseph Smith,

Latter-day Saints believe the parables of Matthew 13 have both an ancient and a modern application. Regarding the latter, Joseph Smith taught that their deepest meaning is found only when the parables are seen as an organic whole and “afford us as clear an understanding upon the importance of the gathering [of Israel] as anything recorded in the Bible.”⁴⁶ In Joseph Smith’s mind, the parables illustrate how the gospel came to be restored in the dispensation of the fulness of times.

The other major location where some of the best-known parables of Jesus were delivered was across the river Jordan in the district of Perea during the last year of Jesus’s ministry. These are recorded only by Luke and include the parables of the wedding feast (14:7–11), the great supper (14:12–24), the lost sheep (15:1–7), the lost coin (15:8–10), the prodigal son (15:11–32), the unjust steward (16:1–13), and the rich man and Lazarus (16:19–31).

Feeding of the Five Thousand

Jesus spent much time in the Galilee pursuing his ministry, teaching “throughout every city and village” (Luke 8:1). He was accompanied by the apostles and by women who “ministered unto him of their substance” (8:3). These are some of the unsung heroes of the early church, who continued to follow and support Jesus, including Mary Magdalene and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household steward (24:1, 10).

About one year before the Crucifixion, word reached Jesus that John the Baptist had been executed by Herod Antipas. He crossed the Sea of Galilee alone by ship to reach a desolate place (Greek *eremon topon*), undoubtedly to mourn John’s death and privately honor him. But when crowds managed to follow, he felt compassion for them and turned from his personal solitude to heal their sick. This further led to the feeding of the great multitude by multiplying the meager number of loaves and fishes.

Immediately afterward, Jesus compelled the apostles to go on ahead to the other side of the lake, sent the crowds away, and went up to a mountain again by himself to pray (Matthew 14:22–23). One of the reasons Jesus sent away the multitude was because some of the men wanted to “take him by force, to make him a king” (John 6:15), and that was contrary to Jesus’s plan. During the fourth watch of the night (about 3–6 a.m.), Jesus met up with his disciples in the ship by walking on the water and helping Peter do the same. When the apostles saw him walking toward them, they cried out in fear, supposing they had seen a spirit. But as on other occasions, Jesus calmed them as he also commanded them: “Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid” (Matthew 14:27).

Fear seems to have been a frequent companion of several of the early disciples. On more than one occasion Jesus offered words of counsel to serve as a powerful antidepressant (e.g., “be of good cheer,” John 16:33) as well as a reminder of the destructive effects of fear and the positive effects of faith (“Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?” Mark 4:40).

Bread of Life Discourse

The next day Jesus and his apostles sailed over to Capernaum. People who were part of the miracle of the loaves and fishes also went to Capernaum seeking Jesus somewhat impertinently, not because they were spiritually enriched and wanted to live better lives. Rather, they had gotten a free meal and were seeking another (JST John 6:26). Jesus told them not to work for temporal sustenance but for that spiritual food that brings eternal life. He testified that such was the work of God. However, the response of his listeners betrayed their real interest: “What sign shewest thou then?” (John 6:30).

This set the stage for one of the most powerful and pivotal sermons of Jesus’s ministry, the Bread of Life, though only John records it (John 6:29–58). Jesus would never again be as popular as he was after the feeding of the five thousand. After the sermon his popularity plummeted, for “many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (John 6:66).⁴⁷ In addition, two other results of the discourse are significant. First, a powerful testimony was elicited from Peter that paralleled and foreshadowed his great confession at Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:13–16). When Jesus asked the Twelve if they would also go away, the chief apostle replied, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6:67–69). Second, Jesus alluded to his future betrayer, Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, though none of the apostles knew this (6:70–71).

Caesarea Philippi and North

Refusing to go to Jerusalem just yet because certain Jews sought to kill him, Jesus continued his ministry in the Galilee (John 7:1). He rebuked scribes and Pharisees for hypocrisy—namely, using their oral tradition to skirt certain precepts of the Mosaic law, particularly responsibility to look after parents (Matthew 15:1–9; Mark 7:1–13). During this period, he and his disciples made an excursion to the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon (ancient Phoenicia, modern Lebanon) and interacted with a gentile woman whose daughter was “grievously vexed with a devil” (Matthew 15:22).

The mother’s plea for help was initially rebuffed by Jesus, who reminded both the woman of Canaan and his disciples that he was sent only to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). But the woman’s worshipful humility, persistence, and cleverness caused Jesus to relent,⁴⁸ cure her daughter, and commend the tenacious mother for her faith (15:25–28).

This episode was the only time we know of when Jesus went to that northern seacoast. According to Mark’s Gospel, Jesus returned from the region of Tyre and came through Sidon to the lake of Galilee (Mark 7:31). This route has been equated with “the trunk road from Tyre to the region of Caesarea Philippi.”⁴⁹ Perhaps Jesus took this route to stop at Caesarea Philippi and use the geology of the region as a graphic visual aid to teach a profound lesson.

Caesarea Philippi sits at the bedrock base of Mount Hermon, the tallest mountain in the region. Standing somewhere near this bedrock base, which visually dominates the area,

Jesus asked the Twelve who men said he was. He then asked them who they believed he was. This elicited Peter's powerful witness: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Jesus identified the source of Peter's knowledge—revelation from the Father that Jesus was the Messiah—and in turn proclaimed Peter's identity and role: "And I say also unto thee [pointing to Peter, as we suppose], That thou art Peter (Greek, *petros*, "small rock"), and upon this rock (Greek *petra*, "bedrock") I will build my church [pointing to the bedrock base of Mount Hermon, as we suppose]" (16:18). Peter was not the foundation of the church; the revelation that Jesus was Messiah was the foundation. Other passages in scripture speak of Jesus Christ as the rock and foundation of a disciple's faith (1 Corinthians 10:4; Helaman 5:12; Doctrine and Covenants 6:34; Moses 7:53).

Jesus then promised that the keys of the kingdom and the sealing power would be given to Peter and the other apostles so that whatever they caused to be bound or loosed on earth would also be effective in heaven (Matthew 16:19). That the keys and sealing power are references to the full authority of the priesthood is made clear in Restoration scripture and the statements of modern prophets.⁵⁰

Transfiguration

According to Matthew and Mark, Jesus's promise of the bestowal of priesthood keys and sealing power was fulfilled six days after events at Caesarea Philippi. At this time he was transfigured (Greek, *metemorphothē*; compare "metamorphosis") before his chief apostles (Mark 9:2), and the ancient prophets Moses and Elijah "appeared in glory" with him and spoke "of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). In fact, Peter, James, and John were also transfigured or else they could not have withstood the glory manifested before them (Moses 1:11). Luke 9:28 places this event after "eight days."

The reason for the visitation of Moses and Elijah on the holy mount was explained by Joseph Smith: "The Savior, Moses, and Elias, gave the keys to Peter, James, and John, on the mount, when they were transfigured before him."⁵¹ A parallel event occurred in Latter-day Saint history in 1835 in the Kirtland Temple with Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery present:

Moses appeared before us, and committed unto us the keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth, and the leading of the ten tribes from the land of the north. . . . After this vision had closed, another great and glorious vision burst upon us; for Elijah the prophet, who was taken to heaven without tasting death, stood before us, and said . . . the keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands; and by this ye may know that the great and dreadful day of the Lord is near, even at the doors. (Doctrine and Covenants 110:11, 13, 16)⁵²

After this event, Jesus continued his Galilean ministry with teaching and healing the people (Matthew 17:14–27).

Later Judean Ministry

The transfiguration event seems to have occurred as the Feast of Tabernacles approached. The chief apostles wanted to craft three tabernacles for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah as the ancient prophets departed, which suggests they recognized the approach of the feast (Luke 9:33). Since the festival was almost upon them and Jesus was still in the Galilee after the Transfiguration, he was chided by his half brothers for not going to Jerusalem to attend the festival, which they said he should have done if he was really the Messiah. Jesus did finally slip into Jerusalem amid popular discussions about him (John 7:11–12).

The Feast of Tabernacles was a seven-day festival, and Jesus taught in the Jerusalem temple precinct during its celebration (John 7:14, 28). Tabernacles was the most joyous of all the celebrations and commemorations of the Jewish liturgical calendar. It marked the end of one agricultural cycle and the beginning of another. Thus, each day of the feast a procession of priests participated in the drawing-of-water ceremony by going down to the Siloam pool to draw water, return to the temple, walk around the altar of sacrifice with a choir chanting from Psalms 113–118 (messianic in their content), and pour out the water as a libation at the time of the morning sacrifice.⁵³ On the last day of the feast, “the great day of the feast,” Jesus did something remarkable. He stood, perhaps as the libation was being poured out, and declared that if anyone came to him and drank, out of their bellies would “flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37–38). Such action must have been an amazing spectacle as Jesus began to announce more formally and publicly his divine sonship.

Earlier in his ministry Jesus had declared to a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well that he was the giver of “living water” (John 4:10). Later, after the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus, the Living Water, sent a blind man down to the Siloam pool—the same pool used in the drawing-of-water ceremony—to wash in that living water⁵⁴ and be healed. On that same occasion (Feast of Tabernacles) Jesus declared himself also to be the “light of the world” (John 9:5). Thus, John emphasized two themes that were very important to him personally—Jesus was the living water and Jesus was the light of the world (John 4:10; 7:38; 1:4, 9; 8:12; compare Revelation 7:17; 21:6).

Judea to Perea

The late fall season of the last year of Jesus’s public ministry witnessed him teaching and continuing the organization of the church. He appointed seventy men, spoke of himself as the Good Shepherd, and proclaimed the existence of other sheep—not of the land of Israel—who would hear his voice (John 10:14–16). This prophecy was fulfilled when the resurrected Jesus visited the Nephites (3 Nephi 15:21–24). While in Judea, Jesus also taught the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) and visited the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus in Bethany, discussing spiritual priorities with them (10:38–42).

As winter commenced and the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) was celebrated, Jesus was in the temple precinct, instructing the Jews. Significantly, he taught the doctrine of theosis (becoming like God) by quoting Psalm 82:6 (“Ye are gods”) in response to the accusation

of blasphemy—that being a man he made himself God (John 10:22–39). This, the ultimate purpose of the Father’s plan, was clearly affirmed by Jesus. He then left Jerusalem and went to Perea to escape persecution and deliver the powerful parables mentioned above.

The episode that brought Jesus back to Judea after several weeks in Perea was the death of his close personal friend, Lazarus. When word reached Jesus in Perea that Lazarus was sick, he purposely waited two days before going to aid him (John 11:1–6). Perhaps he taught the parable of the rich man and Lazarus during those two days, outlining conditions in the spirit world, including the great gulf separating the righteous from the wicked (Luke 16:19–31).⁵⁵ Of course, Jesus knew that Lazarus would die in the interim, affording Jesus the opportunity to teach about his resurrection—the most crucial, pivotal event of the Christian faith—and to foreshadow it by raising Lazarus from the grave. To Mary, the sister of Lazarus, he declared, “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25).

The results of raising Lazarus were both gratifying and despicable. On the one hand, many Jews who witnessed the miracle Jesus performed “believed on him” (John 11:45). On the other hand, reports of the miracle caused the chief priests and Pharisees to convene a council to decide what to do about Jesus. Their concern was selfish at heart: “If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation” (11:48). At Caiaphas’s suggestion the decision was to put Jesus to death (11:49–53). Equally contemptible was the chief priests’ effort to murder Lazarus (12:10). Those responsible for the administration of what was supposed to be the holiest place on earth—the Jerusalem temple—were the very ones who wanted to get rid of both the miracle-worker and the living evidence of the miracle. Therefore, Jesus left the area with his disciples, went to the small village of Ephraim northeast of Jerusalem, and waited for Passover while both the chief priests and Pharisees sought his whereabouts in order to arrest him (11:54–57).

Triumphal Entry

Six days before Passover, the last one of his mortal life, Jesus returned to Bethany to the house of Simon the leper, where Martha, Mary, and Lazarus lodged. Mary anointed him with spikenard, a costly extract from India. Judas Iscariot objected, his fraudulent practices in danger of being exposed “because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it” (John 12:6 NIV). But Jesus defended Mary, her act of devotion and humility foreshadowing his burial anointing (12:1–8). All four Gospels contain an account of a woman anointing Jesus, but at different times during his ministry.⁵⁶

The next day, Sunday, Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a young donkey (JST Matthew 21:5), publicly indicating he was a king, just as Solomon had ridden to his coronation on King David’s mule (1 Kings 1:38). Jesus’s entry into the city of kings on a young donkey symbolized peace and royalty and fulfilled prophecy (Zechariah 9:9). Had he entered the city riding a horse, an entirely different meaning would have been implied—

warfare and conquest.⁵⁷ He was a different kind of Messiah than expected but will someday be seen riding a white horse to inaugurate the Millennium, to “judge and make war” and ultimately subdue “all enemies under his feet” at his second coming (Revelation 19:11–16; Doctrine and Covenants 58:22).

All four Gospels record the triumphal entry, indicating its pivotal nature. Jesus was greeted with the Hosanna Shout (Matthew 21:9).⁵⁸ Great messianic fervor and expectation had filled Jerusalem; “all the city was moved” (21:10). Some believed he was the long-awaited Messiah, others were probably undecided, and still others may have lost faith in him when he turned to the temple and cleansed it instead of the Antonia Fortress (21:12–15). Jesus went back to Bethany, where apparently he lodged the next few nights (21:17).

This Passover week was a whirlwind of activity for Jesus and his disciples. He cursed the fig tree near the village of Bethphage (Hebrew, “house of figs”) for a variety of reasons, all centering on his identity in the face of Judaism’s rejection of him and his teachings (Matthew 21:17–22). He instructed daily in the temple (Luke 22:53; Mark 14:49) and presented three parables on the need for repentance and not hypocrisy (Matthew 21:28–22:14). He chastised the scribes and Pharisees and uttered a significant lament over Jerusalem and its inhabitants (23:1–37). He delivered an important sermon, the Olivet Discourse, concerning the last days, the signs of the times, and the inauguration of the Millennium (JST—Matthew; Matthew 24). And he finished his time with his apostles by instituting two new ordinances and providing unequalled instruction in an upper room during the Passover meal (Matthew 26:17–30; Luke 22:1–38; John 13:1–17:26).

Sacrament Instituted

The Synoptics tell a backstory: two days before the Passover celebration the chief priests, scribes, and elders met in the palace of Caiaphas the high priest and finalized the secret plot to take Jesus and kill him (Matthew 26:2–5; Mark 14:1–2; Luke 22:2). Satan entered into Judas, who covenanted with the Jewish leaders to betray his master for thirty pieces of silver—the price of a slave at that time. Luke reports this chilling development as occurring during the Passover preparations. John places it during the Last Supper (13:27).

After the Passover plot was in place, Jesus’s own preparations for the Festival of Unleavened Bread were carried out by his delegated representatives. The traditional Passover meal is referred to as the Seder (Hebrew, “order, arrangement”) and evokes images of elaborate preparations of special foods, special dining arrangements, and specific recitations presented throughout the evening. Jesus sent Peter and John to secure the location of the Seder meal—a home with a furnished upper room owned by an unnamed disciple of Jesus (Luke 22:7–13).

At the appointed time, thousands of paschal lambs began to be slaughtered within the Jerusalem temple precincts. Josephus indicated that the lambs were to be slain between the ninth and eleventh hours of the day⁵⁹ (from about three to five o’clock in the evening) as Jesus and the apostles prepared for their own paschal commemoration.

We have every reason to believe the Seder meal proceeded in the traditional manner—up to a point. They sat around a *triclinium*, a three-sectioned, low-lying table, against which participants reclined on left elbows with feet pointed away from it. The first cup of wine was blessed and drunk. Hands were washed as a blessing was recited. Bitter herbs, symbolic of the bitterness of Egyptian bondage, were eaten—dipped in sour broth made of vinegar and bruised fruit, both messianic symbols. The origins of Passover were likely recounted by the leader of the Seder service—in this instance, Jesus. The lamb was then placed on the table or, if already on the table, was acknowledged, and the first parts of the Hallel (Psalms 113 and 114) were sung. The second cup of wine was blessed and drunk.

It may have been at this point that something extraordinary happened. According to the Gospel of Luke, instead of breaking the unleavened bread of Passover and reciting the traditional blessing, Jesus “took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). The disciples must have sat in stunned silence. Such a thing as this had never been done before. Such a comment as Jesus had made would have been totally inappropriate—unless, of course, the commentator really was the Messiah.

From this point, a typical Passover dinner usually proceeded at a leisurely pace until everything was eaten and the atmosphere of celebration increased. But the apostles of the Lamb had just eaten a piece of bread and a fragment of lamb not in remembrance of the events of the first Passover (Exodus 12:8), but in remembrance of the Bread of Life and the Lamb of God. Ordinarily, after the dinner portion of the Seder celebration was completed, the third cup of wine, the “cup after supper”—what the rabbis also called “the cup of blessing”—was mixed with water and then blessed and drunk in an atmosphere of celebration. The Gospel of Luke, however, perhaps referring to this cup, describes the scene in the Upper Room with solemn brevity and poignancy: “Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:20).

The new ordinance replaced the old system of animal sacrifice in which a priest ritually slaughtered an offering on behalf of the covenanter. It did away with any priestly intermediary as well as almost all outward aspects of the old system of blood sacrifice. What Jesus said explicitly to the Nephites he said by inference to the apostles during the Last Supper: “And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away. . . . And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:19–20). The same two aspects of sacrifice that the Lord commanded the Nephites to offer in place of animals are the very things Jesus, the Lamb of God, experienced during his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross at the moment he died: Jesus experienced a contrite (“crushed”) spirit in the garden and a broken heart on the cross.⁶⁰

If the activities of the evening had concluded with only the establishment of the sacrament, the night would still have been far spent. But, as it turned out, the evening was far from over. As Jesus and his apostles remained together after the meal, another powerful ordinance was instituted—the washing of the feet—and many powerful and important

teachings were also delivered by the Master. Jesus concluded his final teaching moments on this night of nights by offering what has come to be known as the great high priestly prayer or the great Intercessory Prayer. All of these key events after the Last Supper are recorded in the New Testament uniquely by John (13–17). They include, among other things, instruction on the First and Second Comforters, a powerful discourse on love, and prophecies about the fate of the apostles.

Jesus instituted the ordinance of the washing of the feet as “a holy and sacred rite, one performed by the saints in the seclusion of their temple sanctuaries.”⁶¹ It appears to be an ordinance of ultimate approbation by the Lord and, in a fascinating way, stands in direct contrast to the ordinance of the dusting off of the feet, which seems to be the ultimate earthly ordinance of condemnation by the Lord.

That Jesus performed the ordinance of the washing of the feet for his closest friends is another indication of his attempts to prepare them for the coming spiritual onslaught in Gethsemane as well as to teach them further about his role in fulfilling the law of Moses. “He that has washed his hands and his head, needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit; and ye are clean, but not all. Now this was the custom of the Jews under their law; wherefore, *Jesus did this that the law might be fulfilled*” (JST John 13:10; emphasis added).

John’s Gospel further tells us that after the washing of the feet, Jesus said to his apostles: “Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. . . . Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come. . . . Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards” (John 13:31–36). Here Jesus speaks as though his looming agony in Gethsemane and the suffering on the cross are a foregone conclusion. Jesus’s statement also appears to be a prophecy clearly foreshadowing Peter’s future. According to tradition, Peter was later crucified head downward for the cause of his Master because he felt unworthy to die in the exact manner of Jesus.⁶²

The four Gospels are not clear as to exactly when Judas Iscariot left the Seder dinner to consummate his betrayal, only that he did so after Jesus identified him as the betrayer (John 13:23–30). Was that before the washing of the feet or before the sacrament was instituted? Nor do we know at what moment Jesus and the apostles left the Upper Room to proceed to the Garden of Gethsemane. John 14:31 reports Jesus saying to the group after his instruction on the two Comforters, “Arise, let us go hence.” Indeed, the opening content of John 15, Jesus’s discourse on the True Vine, suggests an outdoor setting because of the readily visible images of vines or vineyards outside Jerusalem’s walls. Others have been less definitive in assigning a location to all the teachings found in John 14–17.

However we view the sequence of scenes, we know that at some point before the end of the Passover experience, Jesus and his apostles concluded by singing together. “And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives” (Mark 14:26). Likely, this hymn was the last part of the great Hallel, a magnificent set of messianic psalms (Psalms

115–18) whose thinly veiled meanings testify of Jesus Christ. One authority has stated that this hymn was preparation for Jesus’s greatest test, which began in Gethsemane.⁶³

Gethsemane

Each of the Gospels contributes to our understanding of events in the Garden of Gethsemane. John tells us that this garden was located across the Kidron brook and that Jesus often visited there with his apostles. Therefore, Judas knew where to find Jesus so that he could be arrested by the temple police (John 18:1–2).

Mark describes the immediate intensity of Jesus’s suffering once inside the garden in the presence of Peter, James, and John. His sadness was so great it caused him to think of death (14:33–34). The phrase “sore amazed” in the King James Version is translated from the Greek *ekthambeisthai*, which Jerome Murphy-O’Connor argues is better rendered “terrified surprise.”⁶⁴ This reaction may be attributed to the uniqueness of this experience. Jesus had never sinned nor felt its effects. So profound was the pain that Jesus asked the Father to rescue him from the experience if possible, but reaffirmed his commitment to do his Father’s will (14:35).

Perhaps looking for relief or distraction but certainly possessing concern for the welfare of the apostles, Jesus got up from a prostrate position, found Peter asleep, asked him to stay alert, went back and offered up the same prayer, and again found the apostles asleep. The Joseph Smith Translation describes the concomitant intense struggle the apostles themselves were facing at the same time Jesus was suffering so intensely:

And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane, which was a garden; and the disciples began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy, and to complain in their hearts, wondering if this be the Messiah. And Jesus knowing their hearts, said to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray. And he taketh with him, Peter, and James, and John, and rebuked them, and said unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here and watch. (JST Mark 14:36–38)

Luke’s unique contribution is twofold. First, an angel from heaven is sent to strengthen Jesus in his extremity (22:43). Second, Luke reports that Jesus’s agony became so intense that he prayed even “more earnestly” and bled from every pore (22:44). Scholars point out that this passage has questionable textual support, it being a later insertion, and that even if viewed as credible, the words “his sweat was as it were [or became like] great drops of blood falling down to the ground” refer to a comparison, not an actual reality.⁶⁵ Latter-day Saint theology appeals to Restoration scripture for clarification in the matter.

The Book of Mormon prophet King Benjamin is quite clear that Jesus would suffer so much, “even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death,” that blood would indeed come “from every pore” (Mosiah 3:7). Even more important is the testimony of the very participant himself. Jesus Christ declared in a latter-day revelation that he, God himself,

suffered so much pain it caused him “to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit” (Doctrine and Covenants 19:18).

The source of Jesus’s hemorrhage is a subject in itself and has been addressed in various articles by modern-day physicians.⁶⁶ There may indeed be a documented medical condition known as hematomatosis, whereby one can literally sweat blood, but the ultimate cause was spiritual. Brigham Young stated that it was the withdrawal of the Father’s powers of light and life in Gethsemane that caused Jesus to sweat blood. President Young said, “If he [Jesus] had had the power of God upon him, he would not have sweat blood; but *all* was withdrawn from him, and a veil was cast over him.”⁶⁷

Matthew’s Gospel implies that Jesus’s suffering was relentless. He prayed the same prayer three times, afterward getting up to check on the apostles. Matthew’s report helps readers to appreciate Jesus’s resistance to Satan’s onslaught in the garden that awful night, as James E. Talmage eloquently described:

Christ’s agony in the garden is unfathomable by the finite mind, both as to intensity and cause. . . . He struggled and groaned under a burden such as no other being who has lived on earth might even conceive as possible. It was not physical pain, nor mental anguish alone, that caused him to suffer such torture as to produce an extrusion of blood from every pore; but a spiritual agony of soul such as only God was capable of experiencing. . . . In that hour of anguish Christ met and *overcame all the horrors that Satan, “the prince of this world,” could inflict.* . . . [It was a] supreme contest with the powers of evil [John 14:30].⁶⁸

Arrest, Trial, and Crucifixion

Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane after he had identified himself and Judas had confirmed that identification with a kiss (John 18:3–8; Matthew 26:49; Luke 22:47). The irony of the scene was prophetically captured by Proverbs 27:6: “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (compare Matthew 26:40). Peter tried to stop the arrest by use of the sword but was chastised by Jesus, citing his ability to call twelve legions of angels (literally seventy-two thousand) to his defense if he desired (John 18:10–12; Matthew 26:51–54). Jesus was taken first to Annas, former high priest (AD 7–15) and father-in-law to the current high priest, Joseph ben Caiaphas (AD 18–36). Though no longer acting as officiating high priest, he was still called high priest (Luke 3:2; John 18:19) since the title and some responsibilities of the high priest were retained until death.⁶⁹ Annas interrogated Jesus, mistreated him, and then sent him to Caiaphas (John 18:13–24).

Jesus was next examined by Caiaphas and then the council of the Jews. He endured insults, false witnesses, illegal proceedings, significant physical abuse, and finally treatment reserved for slaves and the lowest members of the social order (Matthew 26:57–68).⁷⁰ As all this was going on in the residence of Caiaphas, Peter was out in the courtyard denying he was one of Jesus’s associates (Matthew 26:69–75).

Having been declared guilty of blasphemy and worthy of death by Caiaphas, the chief priests, and elders of the people, Jesus was bound and delivered to Pontius Pilate, Roman prefect or governor (Matthew 26:65–66; 27:1–2).⁷¹ Pilate became involved because, as the Jewish leaders reminded the governor, “It is not lawful for us to put any man to death” (John 18:31). According to F. F. Bruce, “the right of jurisdiction in capital cases was most jealously reserved by provincial governors” and permission to exercise it “a very rare concession.”⁷² However, the future case of Stephen before the high priest and chief priests raises questions (Acts 6:9–15; 7:1, 54–60). Jesus’s first appearance before Pilate resulted in his being sent to Herod Antipas, who was in Jerusalem for Passover, because Pilate found nothing from a Roman standpoint to warrant Jesus’s conviction of a capital offense. One senses that because Pilate was already in political trouble over his governance of the Jews in Judea, he wanted someone else to have to deal with Jesus.⁷³ Herod Antipas is the only person we know of to have spoken with Jesus face-to-face but received in return complete “disdainful” silence (Luke 23:4–12). Jesus’s dislike of Herod Antipas was manifest on an earlier occasion when he called him a “fox” (13:32). In the end, Herod also found nothing in Jesus worthy of condemnation. But because of this episode Herod and Pilate became friends, having before been at odds.

Jesus was sent back to Pilate, who again declared Jesus’s innocence to the public and proposed to chastise and release Jesus but was met with protests. Readers are struck by the number of times Pilate proclaimed Jesus’s innocence and tried to release him (John 18:28–38; Luke 23:4, 13–14). Pilate then proposed another way of fulfilling the Passover custom of releasing one prisoner of the people’s choosing—pit Jesus against such a notorious criminal that they would logically choose to release Jesus when compared with a convicted murderer, insurrectionist, and robber (Matthew 27:15–17; Mark 15:6–10; Luke 23:16–17; John 18:40). But the chief priests stirred up the people to call for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus (Matthew 27:20–22; Mark 15:11–14; Luke 23:18–22; John 18:40). Adding to Pilate’s woes was the strong marital admonition of his wife to leave Jesus alone because she had suffered many things in a dream because of him (Matthew 27:19).⁷⁴

The circumstance of Barabbas’s release and Jesus’s condemnation is so thick with irony that it can be cut with the proverbial knife. The given name of Barabbas was also Yehoshua, or Jesus. An ancient variant reading of the text of Matthew 27:16–17 preserves the full name: “Jesus Barabbas.” And the early church theologian Origen (died ca. AD 254) implied that the full name appeared in most of the manuscripts of his day. The term *Barabbas* means, literally, “son of [Aramaic, *bar*] the father [Aramaic, *abba*].” Jesus *was* the true and literal Son of the Father. The angry, stirred-up mob chose to release one Jesus over the other, chose to release one son of the father, rather than the true Son of the Father. Barabbas was the fulfillment of the ritual scapegoat of the sacrificial rites performed on the Day of Atonement—the animal led to the wilderness and released; Jesus of Nazareth was the fulfillment of the goat sacrificed on the temple altar as the sin offering representing the guilt of the people (Leviticus 16:7–22).

Jesus was scourged, mocked, forced to carry his cross to Golgotha, and crucified. Pilate had tried once more to free Jesus, but then resorted to ritual handwashing to try to absolve himself of guilt over the execution of an innocent man (John 19:1–15; Matthew 27:24–32).⁷⁵ Pilate may have come to a genuine belief in Jesus as a holy man, if not the Jewish Messiah, for when chided by the chief priests about the superscription he penned and placed on the cross, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,” he responded curtly, “What I have written I have written” (John 19:19–22).

Jesus uttered seven final statements while on the cross, which in one way or another illuminate his character.

1. “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).
2. “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).
3. “Woman, behold thy son! . . . Behold thy mother!” (John 19:26–27).
4. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46; Psalm 22:1).
5. “I thirst” (John 19:28).
6. “It is finished” (John 19:30).
7. “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46; Psalm 31:5).

John 19:30 must be read in concert with JST Matthew 27:50 (“Father, it is finished, thy will is done”) to appreciate the ultimate significance of Jesus’s death on the cross. This inspiring change to the text brings us back full circle to the promise made by Jesus in our premortal existence to accomplish the Father’s will (Moses 4:2), which fulfillment came only after all things had been accomplished.

Jesus’s remarkable selflessness is magnified against the backdrop of bodily torture and anguish produced by crucifixion. Mark’s Gospel tells us Jesus was nailed to the cross at about nine o’clock in the morning and hung on the cross until around three o’clock in the afternoon (15:25, 34). The unnatural and contorted position of his body on the cross was foreseen by one of Israel’s ancient psalmists and expressed in poetic form (Psalm 22:14). Indeed, Psalm 22:1–20 constitutes an amazingly accurate descriptive prophecy of the specific occurrences associated with Jesus’s crucifixion and ought to be read in tandem with the Gospel accounts. Crucifixion was one of the most brutal and horrible forms of execution ever invented. The Romans did not devise it, but raised it to an art form. However, even the Romans themselves protested its use. The first-century-BC Roman statesman Cicero said that no word could be found to adequately portray this “cruellest and most disgusting punishment.”⁷⁶ Crucifixion was applied especially to slaves in the Roman Empire—a motif seen in the way Jesus was treated by all those who incarcerated him.⁷⁷ Several descriptions by physicians and scholars have been penned over the years, illuminating the kind of pain, torture, and slow death that constituted crucifixion.⁷⁸ Thus, crucifixion was practiced as much for deterrence as for punishment, as the Roman writer Quintilian (ca. AD 35–95) indicated: “Whenever we crucify the guilty, the most crowded roads are chosen, where the most people can see and be moved by this fear. For penalties relate not so much to retribution as to their exemplary effect.”⁷⁹

As soon as Jesus was mercifully released from mortality through physical death, he continued his ministry in the world of spirits (Doctrine and Covenants 138). But there were other occurrences as a result of the Crucifixion: nature convulsed as prophesied (1 Nephi 19:12), an earthquake occurred, there was a period of darkness, and the veil of the temple was torn apart from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). Jesus was buried in a new tomb by two disciples, members of the Sanhedrin, Joseph of Arimathea (owner of the tomb) and Nicodemus. They begged for possession of the body from Pilate, who had guards placed at the tomb, with the faithful women from Judea and Galilee left to witness the burial and plan for its completion following the Sabbath (Matthew 27:57–66; Mark 15:42–16:1; Luke 23:50–56; John 19:38–42).

The Resurrection

The first mortals to learn that something unusual and powerful had taken place at the site where the body of Jesus was buried were the sentinels placed there to make sure disciples could not steal the body and make it appear as though Jesus had risen from the dead after three days, as he had prophesied. A great earthquake occurred as two angels came from heaven and rolled back the stone from the tomb entrance, causing the guards to shake and collapse like dead men from fear (Matthew 28:2–4; JST Matthew 27:62–66).

Next came Mary Magdalene and other women to the tomb in the dawning hours of Sunday morning to anoint the body of Jesus. But they saw the stone rolled away and in the tomb the two angels, with countenances like lightning, who announced the resurrection of Jesus: “Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man⁸⁰ must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words” and so put into motion events that would result in the worldwide Christian faith we see today (JST Matthew 28:3–5; Luke 24:3–8).

Though John’s Gospel presents a slightly different scenario of events that resurrection morning,⁸¹ the ultimate result is the same: many hundreds of witnesses saw for themselves the resurrected Jesus alive, with a tangible body of flesh and bone. The first was apparently Mary Magdalene (John 20:11–18), followed by the other women (Matthew 28:9–10; Mark 16:9–12), then two disciples at Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35), then Simon Peter (24:34), then ten of the Twelve in a closed-door session where the gift of the Holy Ghost was given (John 20:19–23; Luke 24:36–48), and on and on.

In the words of New Testament scholar Bruce Metzger,

The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is overwhelming. Nothing in history is more certain than that the disciples believed that, after being crucified, dead, and buried, Christ rose again from the tomb on the third day. . . . The most obvious proof that they believed this is the existence of the Christian church. . . . Never were hopes more desolate than when Jesus of Nazareth was taken down from the cross and laid in the tomb. Stricken with grief at the death of their Master, the disciples were dazed

and bewildered. Their mood was one of dejection and defeat, reflected in the spiritless words of the Emmaus travelers, ‘We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel’ (Luke 24:21). . . . [Yet] fifty-some days after the crucifixion the apostolic preaching of Christ’s resurrection began in Jerusalem with such power and persuasion that the evidence convinced thousands.⁸²

More importantly, not only did the ancient disciples believe that Jesus was resurrected, there exist modern disciples who possess that sure witness. Regarding Jesus of Nazareth, Ezra Taft Benson once said, “He lives! He lives with a resurrected body. There is no truth or fact of which I am more assured, or know better by personal experience, than the truth of the literal resurrection of our Lord.”⁸³ By his resurrection, along with all his life and ministry, Jesus of Nazareth showed himself to be Jesus the Christ.



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Further Reading

- Brown, Raymond E. *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*. Anchor Bible Reference Library. Updated ed. New York: Doubleday, 1999.
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- McConkie, Bruce R. *The Mortal Messiah*. 4 vols. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979–1981.
- Notley, R. Steven. *In the Master’s Steps: The Gospels in the Land*. Jerusalem: Carta, 2015.
- Ogden, D. Kelly, and Andrew C. Skinner. *Verse by Verse: The Four Gospels*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006.
- Stein, Robert H. *Jesus the Messiah: A Survey of the Life of Christ*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996.
- Talmage, James E. *Jesus the Christ*. With revised and updated notes by Lincoln Blumell, Gaye Strathearn, and Thomas Wayment. Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2015.

Notes

1. Boyd K. Packer inferred that a lack of understanding about the premortal existence is “like one who enters a theater just as the curtain goes up on the second act . . . , making it difficult to figure out who relates to whom and what relates to what” (“The Play and the Plan,” CES fireside for college-age young adults, May 7, 1995, 2). So it is with our understanding about Jesus of Nazareth. Note the January 2000 official declaration by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles entitled “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles,” which begins by discussing Jesus’s premortal activity. Two principal Latter-day Saint treatises on the life of Jesus Christ, both written by apostles, begin by discussing Jesus’s activity in our premortal existence. See James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), and Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995).
2. Stephen E. Robinson and H. Dean Garrett, *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004), 3:180–81.
3. However, in John 8:58 Jesus unequivocally proclaims that he is Jehovah. That the Jews understood this is clear from their response, which was to stone him.

4. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 217–18, 226.
5. The term *Elias* is used in several ways in scripture: a messenger who appeared in the Kirtland Temple, committing the keys of the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham (Doctrine and Covenants 110:12); the Greek form of the name Elijah; a name-title of one who performs a preparatory work, that is, a forerunner, such as John the Baptist (JST John 1:21–38); a name-title of one whose mission it is to commit keys and powers in this dispensation of the fulness of times, such as Noah or Gabriel (Doctrine and Covenants 27:6–7) or John the Revelator (77:9, 14); and a name-title for Jesus Christ as a restorer (JST John 1:28).
6. John undoubtedly began his ministry at age thirty, when priests and Levites typically began their full-time service in the temple (Numbers 4:3, 47), but we know even less about John’s formative years and preparation than Jesus’s. See Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 12, who says of John: “That John had a social context is a reality overlooked by most of the primary literary material about him. In the Lucan narrative, he appears in the wilderness completely alone—untaught, unmarried, his old father and mother surely dead, without connection to any place, relatives, or sects. At the start of Mark’s Gospel, he is both adopted by the church and separated from his Jewish context. He stands ‘at the beginning of the good news of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God’ (Mark 1:1), as the messenger who will prepare his way (Mark 1:2; cf. Mal. 3:1; Isa. 40:3). John has no background; he simply appears (cf. Matt. 3:1).”
7. The famous Synoptic scene, perhaps near Capernaum, also shows Jesus walking by the Sea of Galilee and calling these disciples to follow him, promising them that he would make them “fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him” (Mark 1:17–18). “Fishers of men” is an Old Testament figure of speech (Jeremiah 16:16), sometimes viewed negatively (e.g., Micah 7:2). But here Jesus uses it positively, asking the disciples’ assistance in the noble cause of drawing converts (“out of the waters of this world into the next of the eschatological life of the age to come” [Samuel Tobias Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary on the New Testament* (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 1987), 59]). Later, Jesus refers to the kingdom of heaven as a net cast into the sea that gathers every kind of follower (Matthew 13:47).
8. Robert J. Matthews, *A Burning Light: The Life and Ministry of John the Baptist* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1972), 38.
9. The Piacenza Pilgrim, traveling in the Holy Land in the sixth century AD, related the following about his visit to Nazareth: “The house of Saint Mary is now a basilica, and her clothes are the cause of frequent miracles. The Jewesses of that city are better looking than any other Jewesses in the whole country. They declare that this is Saint Mary’s gift to them, for they also say that she was a relation of theirs.” Quoted in Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *The Holy Land: An Oxford Archaeology Guide to Earliest Times to 1700*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 424.
10. James F. Strange, “Nazareth,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:1050. See also Eric Meyers and James F. Strange, *Archaeology, the Rabbis, and Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 56.
11. The other three are the Benedictus of Zacharias (Luke 1:68–79), the Gloria in Excelsis Deo of the angels (2:14), and the Nunc Dimittis of Simeon (2:29–32).
12. Madeleine S. Miller and J. Lane Miller, *Harper’s Encyclopedia of Bible Life* (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 1996), 98–99.
13. The term *get* appears to come from the Akkadian *gittu* and then into late Hebrew as *get*. The essential part of the bill of divorcement is very short: “You are now permitted to all men.”
14. Michael Grant, *Jesus, An Historian’s Review of the Gospels* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1977), 70.
15. Melvin J. Ballard, *Sermons and Missionary Services of Melvin Joseph Ballard*, comp. Bryant S. Hinckley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1949), 167.
16. Immaculate conception is the dogma that from the moment of her conception the Virgin Mary was free from all stain of original sin by the grace of God and the merits of Jesus Christ. The earliest proponents of

- this idea appear to be the early church fathers Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, who regarded Mary as the new Eve to correspond with Jesus Christ as the new or second or last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45). The dogma was officially defined by a papal bull decree in 1854: “Ineffabilis Deus,” Pope Pius IX. See F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., “Immaculate Conception of the BVM,” *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 682–93.
17. Robert L. Millet, Camille Fronk Olson, Andrew C. Skinner, and Brent L. Top, *LDS Beliefs: A Doctrinal Reference* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 653.
 18. As to the place of Jesus’s birth, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1979), 513: “The overwhelming evidence to the contrary has made the thesis that Bethlehem was *not* the historical birthplace of Jesus the *communis opinio* of New Testament scholarship.” The majority rejecting Bethlehem opt for Nazareth; a few others opt for Capernaum. As for the time of birth and historical problems associating it with Quirinius’s governorship, see again Raymond Brown’s brief summary, *Birth of the Messiah*, 395.
 19. “Publius Sulpicius Quirinius was made legate of Syria in A.D. 6”—a chronological problem in matching up Jesus’s birth sometime around 6 BC. Again, see Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 395, but Brown does admit that the Greek of Luke 2:2 permits other translations, one of which would resolve Luke’s accuracy issue: “This census was earlier than the one . . .” or “This census was before the governorship of . . .”
 20. See the discussion in Robert H. Stein, *Jesus the Messiah, A Survey of the Life of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 74–75.
 21. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue 77:5*, quoted in Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 401.
 22. Origen, *Against Celsus* 1:51, quoted in Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 401.
 23. Stein, *Jesus the Messiah*, 76.
 24. See the discussion in Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 167.
 25. Herod’s order to kill all children in the area that were under two years old provides evidence that upwards of two years had transpired between Jesus’s birth and the arrival of the magi, as well as the fact that Matthew now refers to Jesus as a small boy or toddler.
 26. Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 234 (quoting from the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*).
 27. It also bespeaks an interest on Luke’s part, seen in both his Gospel and the book of Acts, about the role of the temple in the early church. Jesus and his family had probably gone to the temple in obedience to the command that all males of the covenant appear before the Lord three times a year, for the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover), the Feast of Harvest or First Fruits (Shavuot or Weeks), and the Feast of Ingathering (Succoth or Tabernacles), as described in Exodus 23:14–17.
 28. David Flusser, *Jesus*, trans. Ronald Walls (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 18.
 29. Millar Burrows, “The Origin of the Term ‘Gospel,’” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 44, nos. 1–2 (1925): 21.
 30. Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River at a locale known as Bethabara, Hebrew for “house or place of the ford” (John 1:28; 1 Nephi 10:9), traditionally identified with a site east of Jericho, north of the place where the Jordan empties into the Dead Sea. There John was also interviewed by a delegation of Levites and priests from Jerusalem and declared Jesus to be the Messiah and an Elias who would restore all things (JST John 1:20–34).
 31. The Mishnah is the codification of Jewish oral law discussed by the early or Tannaitic rabbis and is the core of the Talmud (both Babylonian and Palestinian).
 32. That Jesus entered the wilderness immediately after his baptism argues for this region since Bethabara (baptism site) is nearby.
 33. Stein, *Jesus the Messiah*, 105.
 34. *True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 82.
 35. See Articles of Faith 1:10: “Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and . . . the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.”

36. Each of the six stone pots held two to three firkins. A firkin is about nine gallons.
37. The pervasive nature of Hellenism, even in Jewish culture, is seen in the very name of this Jewish leader. The name Nicodemus is Greek, meaning “victory of the people.”
38. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.119. However, some scholars doubt the location, believing Josephus’s account to be unreliable. See, for instance, R. Steven Notley, *In the Master’s Steps: The Gospels in the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2014), 18.
39. Matthew mentions a multitude in connection with the sermon coming from Galilee, the Decapolis (a ten-city league mostly Gentile), Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan (Perea).
40. Of the Beatitudes, for example, President Harold B. Lee said, “Jesus is actually describing the qualities of an exalted person.” Harold B. Lee, *Decisions for Successful Living* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 21.
41. Again, Harold B. Lee: “These declarations of the Master are known in the literature of the Christian world as the Beatitudes and have been referred to by Bible commentators as the preparation necessary for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. For the purposes of this discussion may I speak of them as something more than that as they are applied to you and me. They embody in fact the constitution for a perfect life.” *Decisions for Successful Living*, 21.
42. For a powerful, succinct discussion about Jesus’s miracles, see Robert J. Matthews, “The Miracles of Jesus,” *The Instructor*, May 1967, 211–12.
43. See *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 43.
44. See Mark 5:41 NRSV.
45. George A. Buttrick, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1928), xiii.
46. Manuscript History of the Church, November 16, 1835, Book B1 (September 1, 1843–November 2, 1838), 643–51.
47. Reasons for disciples leaving Jesus are found in the sermon’s content, which may be broken down into three parts: first, Jesus testified he was the Bread of Life (John 6:32–41); second, the people were told to stop murmuring and turn to Jesus (6:41–50); and third, Jesus then foreshadowed the sacrament in very unappealing language (6:51–58).
48. The exchange centered on the Greek word *kunariois*, a diminutive that means “puppy” or “little dog,” as in a household pet. The woman turns the term to her advantage. *A Lexicon Abridged from Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 399.
49. Notley, *In the Master’s Step*, 51.
50. See Doctrine and Covenants 7:7; 128:8–14; 132:7; Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939), 136; and D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, *Verse by Verse: The Four Gospels* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 331–32.
51. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 105.
52. Other happenings of a sacred nature transpired on the mount that are not recorded in the New Testament. One of these was a vision of the future transfiguration of the earth itself “according to the pattern which was shown unto mine apostles upon the mount; of which account the fulness ye have not yet received” (Doctrine and Covenants 63:21). Jesus taught the apostles about Elias and John the Baptist (Matthew 17:10–13), the latter of whom JST Mark 9:3 informs us was present as Elias on the mount to support his cousin as turbulent challenges were increasing in magnitude and pace for Jesus.
53. Beth Uval, “Streams of Living Water,” *Jerusalem Perspective* 49 (October–December 1995): 7–8.
54. The term *living water* is a multifaceted concept possessing several meanings. The Bible contains references to the concept of living water. Jehovah was the fountain of living water (Jeremiah 2:13). Living water was salvation (Isaiah 12:3; 2 Nephi 22:3). Literally speaking, living water is running water, or water originating in the earth (springs and rivers) or its atmosphere, as in rainwater, that is regarded as being from God. Living water has a purifying and cleansing function (Leviticus 14:5–6, 50–52; 15:13). Thus, living water is an apt metaphor for Jesus—the Lamb that will lead to the living fountains of water (Revelation 7:17) for eternal

- life. God will give to everyone who thirsts water from the fountain of the water of life (Revelation 21:6). In Judaism living water refers to the ritual immersion bath, or *mikveh*.
55. We know that the parable was given in Perea. Since the only two places where Lazarus is mentioned in the four Gospels is, one, in connection with the parable that speaks of Lazarus dying and, two, the report of Lazarus's actual death and being raised to life, it seems logical that the timing of the parable coincided with Lazarus's death.
 56. Matthew and Mark place the anointing two days before Passover, John six days before, and Luke much earlier, during a feast in Galilee. See Matthew 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; John 12:1–3; Luke 7:36–50.
 57. The symbolism of the donkey on the one hand and the horse on the other is ably treated in James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1961), 516–17.
 58. The Hosanna Shout is of ancient origin and has been uttered on different occasions to welcome the Lord to various locations: to Jerusalem (Matthew 21:9), to the American continent (3 Nephi 11:16–17), and to modern temples (Doctrine and Covenants 109:7–9). The Hebrew word *hosanna*, which means “save now,” comes from Psalm 118:25, one of the messianic psalms of the Hallel (Psalms 113–18).
 59. Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.423–425, trans. H. J. Thackeray, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). He also claimed that the number of Passover lambs slain during a single Passover season reached an incredible 255,600.
 60. See Dana M. Pike, “3 Nephi 9:19–20: The Offering of a Broken Heart,” in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Gaye Strathearn and Andrew C. Skinner (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2010).
 61. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 1:708.
 62. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.1.2.
 63. Boyd K. Packer, “Inspiring Music—Worthy Thoughts,” *Ensign*, January 1974, 28.
 64. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, “What Really Happened at Gethsemane?” *Bible Review* 14:2 (April 1998), <https://www.baslibrary.org/bible-review/14/2/13>, 4.
 65. Stein, *Jesus the Messiah*, 215. On the issues associated with Luke 22:43–44 see, for example, Bart D. Ehrman and Mark A. Plukett, “The Angel and the Agony: The Textual Problem of Luke 22:43–44,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45 (1983): 401–16. They argue that the verses in question are “an interpolation made early in the second century” (401).
 66. For example, see William D. Edwards, Wesley J. Gabel, and Floyd E. Hosmer, “On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 225, no. 11 (March 21, 1986): 1455–56.
 67. *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 3:205–6; emphasis added.
 68. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 613; emphasis added.
 69. Mishnah Horayot 3:4.
 70. Andrew C. Skinner, “Two Crucified Men: Insights into the Death of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,” in *Bountiful Harvest: Essays in Honor of S. Kent Brown*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner, D. Morgan Davis, and Carl Griffin (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2011), 374–79.
 71. R. Steven Notley, “Pontius Pilate: Sadist or Saint?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 43, no. 4 (July/August 2017): 43–45. The historicity of Pontius Pilate is beyond question. In 1961 an Italian archaeological team, excavating the Herodian theater in ancient Caesarea Maritima, found a limestone block with an engraved, four-line inscription containing the name of Pontius Pilate and his title “prefect of Judea.” This suggests that Pilate was a prefect, not a procurator. He was the fifth prefect, appointed after Coponius (AD 6–9), Ambivius (AD 9–12), Rufus (AD 12–15), and Gratus (AD 15–26). Initially, in the Roman Empire prefects were officials with military responsibilities and procurators were officials with financial responsibilities primarily. In Egypt and the eastern portion of the Roman Empire there were no procurators before AD 41, the beginning of Claudius's reign (AD 41–54).
 72. F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York: Doubleday, Galilee Book, 1969), 200.

73. The Pilate inscription also may help to explain how the Jewish leaders could maneuver Pilate into giving them what they wanted concerning Jesus. The inscription indicates Pilate was dedicating the Tiberium, a building in Caesarea, to Tiberius in order to ingratiate himself with the emperor. Pilate seems to have gotten in trouble with the emperor over incidents that provoked protests from his subjects and highlighted his poor judgment and leadership. Thus, when Pilate tried to have Jesus released, the Jews responded, “If you release [Jesus], you are no friend of Caesar!” (John 19:12; translation mine). For more on Pilate’s complex personality, see the succinct summary in R. Steven Notley, *Jerusalem: City of the Great King* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2015), 42. He cites Philo and Josephus, who wrote of Pilate’s reputation for brutality, inflexibility, stubbornness, cruelty, venality, violence, robbery, abusive behavior, and savage ferocity.
74. Because of her defense of Jesus, Pilate’s wife was later honored as a saint in the Greek Orthodox Church. See Paul J. Achtemeier, ed., *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 559.
75. The assessment of Elder Neal A. Maxwell emphasizes what some writers are reluctant to acknowledge—Pilate had the ability to insist on Jesus’s release: “Pilate sought to refuse responsibility for deciding about Christ, but Pilate’s hands were never dirtier than just after he had washed them.” Neal A. Maxwell, “Why Not Now?” *Ensign*, November 1974, 13.
76. Cicero, *Against Verres* 2.5.165.
77. Cicero, *Against Verres* 2.5.169.
78. C. Truman Davis, “A Physician Testifies about Crucifixion,” *Review of the News*, April 14, 1976, 37; Edwards, Gabel, and Hosmer, “On the Physical Death of Jesus,” 1460; Joseph Zias and Eliezer Sekeles, “The Crucified Man from Giv’at ha-Mivtar—A Reappraisal,” *Biblical Archaeologist*, September 1985, 190.
79. Quintilian, *Declamations* 274, as cited in Gerald G. O’Collins, “Crucifixion,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:1208.
80. The phrase “son of man” is used in the Old Testament to describe simply a man (Numbers 23:19; Job 25:6; Psalms 8:4; 80:17) and is found some ninety times in Ezekiel. In Daniel 7:13–14 the “Son of man” is portrayed as a heavenly figure, entrusted by God with authority, glory, and power. In the Gospels the phrase is Jesus’s most common title for himself, used eighty-one times, and only by Jesus of himself. That it is a messianic title seems obvious from Matthew 12:8 and Mark 8:31, where it is juxtaposed with Peter’s declaration that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ. Later Christians in the early church used the title of Jesus, as demonstrated by Stephen (Acts 7:56).
81. The conflicts presented by the difference in the Synoptic accounts versus John’s account are able to be reconciled. See, for example, Thomas M. Mumford, *Horizontal Harmony of the Four Gospels in Parallel Columns* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 163n260.
82. Bruce Metzger, *New Testament*, 126–27.
83. Ezra Taft Benson, “Five Marks of the Divinity of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, December 2001, 12.