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GOD'S GREAT covenant

A Bible Course
for Children

New
Testament **1**

The Gospels

Claire A. Larsen





God's Great Covenant, New Testament 1, The Gospels

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Version 1.0

ISBN-13: 978-1-60051-073-1

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Cover art by Rob Baddorf

Interior illustrations by Jason Rayner

Interior design by Lenora Riley

Classical Academic Press

3920 Market Street

Camp Hill, PA 17011

www.ClassicalAcademicPress.com

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my mother, Betty B. Arnold, who has told stories of Jesus to children for sixty years, and to my grandchildren, Lauren, Lyla, and Christian, who love to hear stories of Jesus.

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Introduction

Echoing again and again through the centuries, always the same, always bursting with promise and blessing, are the words of the LORD God promising His people: “I will be your God, and you will be My people.”¹ It all began when God told an ordinary man named Abram to leave his home in Ur, a Middle Eastern center of wealth and culture, and travel to an unknown location. Abram wandered the fertile pasturelands and gentle mountain slopes of Canaan with his family and flocks. Three times the LORD God assured Abram (whose name God changed to Abraham) that He would be his God. He promised to give him a son, a land, and a blessing.²

Years passed. These words, repeated through divine appearances, dreams, and visions to Abraham’s descendents, changed their lives. Time went by, and the family moved to Egypt to escape the famine in Canaan.

For 400 years while the family of 70 people grew to a nation of hundreds of thousands, the LORD’s voice was silent. When the pharaoh of Egypt enslaved God’s people,³ they groaned in their slavery and cried out for help.⁴ Their cry went up to God and He heard them. Not only was God concerned about them because of their harsh life, He also remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and was ready to send their deliverer.⁵ Then, in the wilderness of Midian, a shepherd named Moses heard God speak again. From a bush that glowed with fire but didn’t burn up, the voice of the LORD said, “I AM WHO I AM. I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”⁶ The LORD told Moses to return to Egypt and deliver His people, the Israelites, from Pharaoh’s slavery.⁷ The LORD repeated to the people the words that had brought hope to Abraham: “I will take you as My own people, and I will be your God.”⁸

The next time the LORD spoke these words, they echoed off the craggy cliffs of Mt. Sinai amidst booming thunder, lightning flashes, and trumpet blasts.⁹ The LORD made a covenant, a divine promise, with the people of Israel to live among them, protect them from their enemies, and guide them safely to the land He was giving them.¹⁰ He promised to be their God, making a covenant with His people, but He also said that the people must worship only Him.¹¹

Actually, the covenant began in the Garden of Eden when into God’s perfect garden, evil crept, and through lies and deceit, Satan tempted Eve to disobey God.¹² After Adam followed his wife’s example and ate the fruit, God had to banish them from the garden.¹³ Before they

1. See Jeremiah 7:23.

2. See Genesis 12, 15, 17.

3. See Exodus 1:8-22.

4. See Exodus 2:23.

5. See Exodus 2:24-25.

6. See Exodus 3:14-15.

7. See Exodus 3:16-20.

8. See Exodus 6:7.

9. See Exodus 20:1, 18.

10. See Exodus 23:20-23.

11. See Exodus 23:24-25.

12. See Genesis 3:1-6.

13. See Genesis 3:6-13,

16-19, 23-24.

left in shame, God promised that He would send a Savior who would pay for their sin and make it possible for them to live eternally with Him.¹⁴ This was the beginning of God's covenant of grace.

The God of the covenant was also the King. He kept all His promises, but God's people, the Israelites, now living in the Promised Land, demanded that a human king rule over them. They rejected God as their King.¹⁵ God granted their desire, and human kings ruled Israel for over 500 years. Most of the kings were wicked men who hated the LORD and worshipped idols. Selfishness and a thirst for power soon split the kingdom in half. In the northern kingdom (named Israel), none of the kings followed the LORD, and after 200 years of idolatry and wickedness, God sent the murderous Assyrian army to judge Israel. Like a raging river at flood season, the Assyrians ravaged the land and killed or captured all but a few people. Never again did the northern kingdom exist as a nation.

Some of the kings in the southern kingdom (named Judah) kept the covenant and worshipped the LORD, but most of them worshipped the gods of the nations around them. Despite warnings from many prophets, the people persisted in their sin. The justice of the holy God required that Judah also experience God's judgment. The Babylonian army conquered Jerusalem, desecrated and destroyed Solomon's magnificent temple, and took the people into exile, leaving only a remnant in Jerusalem.

While God's people were in exile, prophets reminded them of the covenant. Jeremiah warned the few people left in Jerusalem, and Ezekiel comforted the exiles in Babylon with these words: "I will be your God and you will be my people."¹⁶ They said that the people would return to their land after seventy years.

God's people had suffered so much. Where was the LORD while all this was happening? Had He lost control of the nations? Was He helpless to bring about His plan of salvation? Worse yet, had He forgotten His people and the promises He had made to them through the years? Absolutely not! Behind the events of human history, God was reigning supreme. Everything was happening according to His plan. Through the mouths of the Old Testament prophets, two themes echoed again and again: *covenant* and *kingdom*. After the last prophet, Malachi, died and the LORD's voice was no longer heard, the faithful clung to the promises He had made.

Through another 400 years of silence, they waited and watched. Someone was coming who would bring about the new covenant.¹⁷ The LORD would forgive their sin, and once again

14. See Genesis 3:14-15.

15. See 1 Samuel 8:1-9.

16. Jeremiah 7:23; see Ezekiel 11:20.

17. See Jeremiah 31:31-34.

would they hear the blessed words, “I will be your God and you will be My people.” Someone was coming—a King and Messiah—who would rule wisely, do what was right, and deliver God’s people from their enemies.¹⁸ How long would they have to wait? No one knew for sure, and the wait seemed endless.

In *God’s Great Covenant, Old Testament 1*, the story of God’s covenant began. The LORD made a promise to be the God of His people and faithfully kept it. In *God’s Great Covenant, Old Testament 2*, the LORD was introduced as the Sovereign King who planned and controlled everything that happened in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Even though His people sinned and were conquered by enemy empires, He promised to send the Messiah.

In *God’s Great Covenant, New Testament 1*, Jesus, the Messiah and King, was born and fulfilled all God’s promises, but He did not arrive as people expected. The people were looking for a mighty warrior to deliver them from the oppressive Roman government. Instead, He came as the suffering Savior who would die at the hands of the Romans as the sacrifice for sin and death.¹⁹ He was building a kingdom that was not of this world—it was the kingdom of God.²⁰ He is the Son of Man, God’s Servant, the Messiah, and the Son of God. Each of the four units in this text emphasizes one of these names of Jesus. Of course, all through Jesus’ life, all four of these wonderful names applied to Him, but you will be learning about them one at a time and discovering in greater depth what they mean.

In the Old Testament, you read about prophets, priests, and kings. Some men, such as Samuel, had two of these important positions (prophet and priest), but no one was all three except Jesus, who, as Prophet, communicated God’s truth; as Priest, sacrificed Himself for His people’s sin; and, as King, rules supremely. Each chapter in this text points to ways in which Jesus serves His people as Prophet, Priest, and King.

In coming to earth, Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament covenant and ushered in the new covenant. The new covenant is not new in that it is different from the old covenant, but it’s new because it reaches deeper into the human heart and stretches out to the whole world.

Jesus comes with humility and gentleness, with power and authority, and with mysteries too incomprehensible for the human mind. Who is Jesus Christ? Let’s discover Him together.

The Covenant of Grace

From Adam to Jesus, the covenant of grace is not several covenants, but one covenant that unfolds through the years. The covenant began in the Garden of Eden with Adam.

18. See Jeremiah 23:4; Zechariah 9:9-17.

19. See Isaiah 53:6-9; John 3:16.

20. See John 18:36.

God renewed the covenant with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. With each renewal of the covenant, its content became larger and its scope reached a greater number of people. When Jesus came, He fulfilled all the requirements of the covenant and secured redemption for His people. From Genesis to Revelation, the covenant of grace is one covenant because throughout the entire Bible it is the same God who established the covenant and because God’s people come to Him in the same way: by God’s grace through faith.

Old and New Covenants: How They Are the Same	New Covenant: How It Differs From the Old Covenant
God promises to be the God of His people. ²¹	God extends the scope of the covenant to all the nations. ²²
God promises to be present with His people. ²³	Jesus, Immanuel, comes as the God-Man and dwells among His people. ²⁴
God guarantees the covenant with His own life. ²⁵	Jesus is both the once-for-all perfect sacrifice and the great High Priest. ²⁶
Sin is cleansed through sacrifice.	Unlike animal sacrifices, Jesus died once and paid the penalty for sin. ²⁷
There is no fault with the covenant; the fault lies with the people who are unable to keep the covenant. ²⁸	Old Testament sacrifices were a picture, but Jesus’ death is the reality of redemption for God’s people. ²⁹
Keeping God’s law doesn’t save a person, but God expects His people to obey His law. ³⁰	Jesus abolished the aspects of the law (not the moral law) that separated Jew from Gentile. ³¹
Obedience must be from the heart. ³² Closeness with God is part of God’s covenant. ³³	There is a final remedy for sin, and forgiveness has been accomplished at the cross. ³⁴
From the beginning, true believers were and still are saved through grace by faith, not by their works. ³⁵	Faith sees Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises and the center of covenantal faith. ³⁶

21. See Exodus 6:7.
22. See Matthew 28:19-20 and Romans 11:11-16.
23. See Exodus 29:45-46, 33:12-17; Hebrews 13:5.
24. See Matthew 1:22-23.
25. See Genesis 15:1-21; Hebrews 6:13-20, 10:5-10.
26. See Romans 6:10; Hebrews 4:14-16, 8:1-6.
27. See Hebrews 10:1-5.
28. See Jeremiah 5:23, 17:1, 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:8-12.
29. See Hebrews 9:11-15.

30. See Exodus 34:10-14; Jeremiah 31:31-34; John 14:15; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14.
31. See Ephesians 2:11-18.
32. See Deuteronomy 6:4-6, 11:18; Psalm 37:31, 40:8; Luke 6:43-45.
33. See Psalm 103:8-14.
34. See Romans 5:6-11.
35. See Romans 4; Ephesians 2:8-9.
36. See John 8:24, 42.

UNIT I

Jesus, the Son of Man, Has Come . . . To Live Among His People

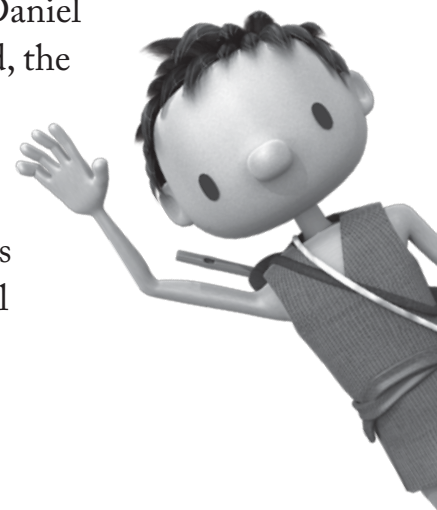
THEME: Jesus, the Son of Man, is like us in every way, yet so very different.

What name do you like to be called? Maybe your name is Elizabeth or Jacob, but you want your friends to call you Liz or Jake. Maybe you like being called Michael or Sophia, but your grandmother insists on calling you Mikey or Sophie. The name you prefer says something about how you see yourself.

Jesus Christ had many names. The name Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means “the LORD saves.” God spoke to the prophet Isaiah and declared that a virgin would have a son named Immanuel meaning “God with us.”¹ Jesus and Immanuel are two of Jesus’ names.

Jesus gave Himself many names, most of them word pictures that taught important truths about who He was, such as “good shepherd,”² “bread of life,”³ “light of the world.”⁴ But the name He used most often to refer to Himself was “Son of Man.”⁵

The prophet Daniel wrote about the Son of Man. In a vision, Daniel saw the Son of Man coming in the clouds and standing before God, the Ancient of Days. Then God gave the Son of Man sovereign power and authority over everything, and all the nations worshipped Him. God proclaimed that the Son of Man’s kingdom would endure forever and never be destroyed.⁶ The Son of Man was no less than God Himself—a being worthy to be worshipped and powerful enough to rule the world.



1. See Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23.

2. John 10:11.

3. John 6:35, 48.

4. John 8:12, 9:5.

5. Matthew 8:20, 9:6, 10:23; Mark 2:10; Luke 9:22; John 3:14, 5:27, etc.

6. See Daniel 7.

Jesus identified Himself as the Son of Man whenever He wanted people to know that He was the Savior who would save His people from their sin. The Jewish people associated the name “Son of Man” with the Son of Man written about in Daniel, and when they heard Jesus call Himself by this name, they realized that Jesus thought that He was God.⁷

The name “Son of Man” has a second meaning. Even though Jesus was divine, He was also human. Jesus is the only person ever born who is completely God and completely man. Jesus got hungry, thirsty, and tired. He suffered in all the ways that you suffer. Yet, no matter how much He suffered, He was always obedient to God the Father and He never sinned, not even once! In fact, it was through His suffering that He learned to be obedient.⁸

Jesus chose to be born a man for two reasons. First, He knew that only a perfect man could die for mankind’s sin. Second, He wanted to experience everything that you experience. He knew that if He suffered as you suffer, you would be more likely to trust Him because you would know that He understood you.⁹

Jesus was God walking on earth in a human body with a human spirit. One of the leaders of the early Christian church, Saint Augustine, said, “The Son of God became the Son of Man that you who were the sons of men might be made sons of God.”¹⁰

As the Son of Man, the God-Man, Jesus fulfilled all the promises of the covenant. All throughout the Old Testament, the LORD God had repeated the words, “I will be your God, and you will be My people.” Now God, in the person of Jesus, had come to live among His people.

Jesus, the Son of Man, is just like you because He was a real human person, but He is distinct from you because He is God Himself. This is the Jesus who loves you, lived for you, and died for you. This is the Jesus whose story is told in the gospel books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

7. See Daniel 7:13; John 8:12-59.

8. See Hebrews 5:7-8.

9. See Hebrews 2:10-11, 14-18, 4:15.

10. Brand, Draper, and England, *Holman Bible Dictionary*, p. 1518.

Chapter 1

Jesus in Eternity and Time

THEME: The Son of Man is the eternal God who becomes man.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 1:1-18 Luke 1:1-4, 3:23-38 John 1:1-14

MEMORY PASSAGE: Matthew 1:22-23

KEY FACTS:

The Four Gospels

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Jesus is...	The Messiah	God's Servant	Son of Man	Son of God
Audience	Jews	Gentiles/Romans	Gentiles/Greeks	Believers
Emphasis	Jesus' words	Jesus' actions	Jesus' humanity	Jesus' deity
Purpose	To show that Jesus is the Messiah, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy	To record the historical events of the good news of salvation	To write an orderly account of Jesus' life so believers would be certain of what they have been taught	To record Jesus' signs so people would believe that Jesus is the Christ and have life through Him
Key Words	Kingdom of heaven, Son of David, fulfilled	Immediately	Son of Man, praising God	Believe, know, My Father, glorify, life
Key Verse	Matthew 1:22-23	Mark 10:45	Luke 19:10	John 20:31
Uniqueness	Fulfilled prophecy	Detailed stories	Chronological order	"I am" statements

PROPHECY FULFILLED:

In the Old Testament, there were prophets, priests, and kings. Jesus Christ fulfills Old Testament prophecy by being the perfect Prophet (see Matthew 7:28-29), Priest (see John 1:29), and King (see Matthew 21:1-11).



Jesus in Eternity and Time

Think back before Jesus was born, back before King David ruled or Moses crossed the Red Sea. Think back before Abraham or Noah lived or Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. Think back before the beginning of time when nothing existed, and there was only blackness.

“In the beginning was the Word.”¹ With these words, the Apostle John began the story of Jesus’ life. It is clear that John carefully chose these words because the word “Word” has a significant meaning, both in English and in Greek, the original language of the New Testament. The Greek word for “word” is *logos*, which means “an explanation or reason for something otherwise meaningless.”² As the Word, Jesus brought greater understanding of who God was.

The Jews believed that God’s Word, or the Scripture, was more than just wise, religious instruction. Behind God’s Word was a divine power and an ability to accomplish God’s purposes that human words couldn’t have. When the Apostle John called Jesus the Word (*Logos*), he was communicating two important truths. First, he was declaring that Jesus Christ was God Himself through whom all things were created and by whom all things have life.³ He was the Word who made things happen when He spoke. Second, John was proclaiming that Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, became a man so that, as the Word, He could communicate to mankind who God is.

Prophet:

Jesus is the Word who shows people who God is.

“The Word became flesh.”⁴ These words of John’s are a declaration of Jesus’ humanity. His statement was clear: the divine Son of God was human in every way so that mankind could see God’s glory. What does that mean? It means that God, in the person of Jesus Christ, became a man so that people on earth could understand a little better what God is like. God is a spirit who has limitless power, wisdom, love, and justice. Because of these characteristics, God is too big for ordinary people like us to comprehend. So, Jesus, the God-Man—deity wrapped up in a human body—brought God in all His perfection down to earth. He showed us God’s power, wisdom, love, and justice during His time here.

1. John 1:1.

2. Brand, Draper, and England, *Holman Bible Dictionary*, 1044-1045.

3. See Colossians 1:15-20.

4. John 1:14.

Comparison of the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John

Matthew, Mark, and Luke	John
Stories about the Galilean ministry	Stories about the Judean ministry
Jesus' public speeches (parables/long speeches)	Jesus' private conversations with His disciples
What Jesus did (miracles/speeches)	Who Jesus was ("I am" passages)
Events included in other gospels	Events not included in other gospels

The four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) tell you everything you need to know about the historical man named Jesus. Yet, these books do not fit the usual definition of a biography, because they only relate certain parts of Jesus' life. Through God's Spirit, the authors wrote down the events that would explain God's covenant to His people and would complete the story of redemption begun in Genesis 3. Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament covenant.

The Bible has four accounts of Jesus' life. Three of the accounts (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are called the synoptic gospels because they generally present the same information in a similar manner. (The word "synoptic" means "to see in a similar way" and the word "gospel" means "good news.") The Gospel of John contains stories that the other three gospels generally do not have.

Genealogies:

A genealogy is an account of a person's ancestors. The genealogy of Jesus Christ established two things:

1. Jesus had a human ancestry.
2. Jesus had a royal lineage as the descendant of King David.

The genealogy given in Matthew 1:1-17 emphasizes Jesus' royalty. It traces Jesus' ancestors from Abraham to King David through the line of kings to Joseph, the husband of Mary. It is interesting to note that even though Joseph was not Jesus' father by birth (the Holy Spirit was the Father of Jesus), Joseph, Jesus' adopted father, was from the royal line of David. In the genealogy in Matthew 1, Matthew mentions three women: Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth. Luke's genealogy in Luke 3:23-38 traces Mary's lineage and emphasizes Jesus' humanity and goes backwards to Adam. Through Luke's genealogy, we learn that Jesus is blood-related to King David through His mother Mary.

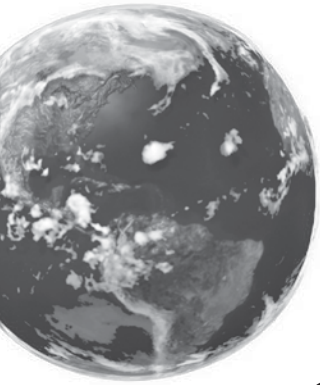
Each gospel writer wrote to a different group of people and had a different purpose. Each author chose to write about a different set of events (although there are similarities in the synoptics), and the word choices they made vary from book to book. Sometimes the chronological order of the events may differ and the specific details of the stories may seem to conflict, but each of the accounts is historically accurate and completely true.

King:

Jesus was born from the royal line of King David.

Matthew and Luke record the genealogy of Jesus. Though these lists of names may seem hard to pronounce and boring to read, they tell you that Jesus was born as a Jew, from the royal line of David, in the covenant family of Abraham, and as the fulfillment of prophecy. So, in God's perfect time, Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, Messiah the King, was born.

In the Bible, God has given us four written gospels accounts, but there is actually only one story and one gospel message. We know that the word “gospel” comes from a Greek word that means “good news.” What is God's good news? It is this: the almighty, perfectly holy God wants to live in relationship with sinful mankind and has provided a way to do that through Jesus Christ.



Every person has sinned and that sin separates him from God.⁵ That sin cannot be ignored; it must be judged and punished. In His great mercy, God became man in the person of Jesus Christ and, after living a life of perfect obedience, Jesus died on the cross, taking on Himself the punishment for sin that His people justly deserved. Three days after dying on the cross, Jesus rose again from the dead, proving His victory over death. God forgives all those who ask Him for forgiveness and who have faith and trust in Jesus as their Savior and Lord. That's the gospel—that's God's good news for mankind!

“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.” (Galatians 4:4-5)

⁵. See Romans 3:21-26.

Review Worksheets

A. KEY FACTS:

1. In the space provided, write the letter(s) that represents the name of the gospel each phrase best describes.

MT = Matthew **MK** = Mark **L** = Luke **J** = John

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| _____ a. Written to the Romans | _____ b. Jesus as Son of Man |
| _____ c. Written to the Greeks | _____ d. Emphasizes Jesus' words |
| _____ e. Jesus as God's Servant | _____ f. Chronological order |
| _____ g. Key words: believe, know | _____ h. Jesus as Messiah |
| _____ i. Written to Jews | _____ j. Key word: immediately |
| _____ k. Emphasizes Jesus' humanity | _____ l. Fulfilled prophecy |

2. Fill in the blanks:

- a. The word "synoptic" means _____.
- b. The word "gospel" means _____.

B. STORY FACTS: Circle *T* if the sentence is true and *F* if it is false.

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|
| 1. The Greek word <i>logos</i> means "light." | T | F |
| 2. The synoptic gospels emphasize Jesus' Galilean ministry. | T | F |
| 3. A genealogy is a list of a person's ancestors. | T | F |
| 4. All the gospel events are historically accurate and true. | T | F |
| 5. The gospels fit the usual definition of a biography. | T | F |
| 6. The Gospel of John is one of the synoptic gospels. | T | F |

C. TWO IMPORTANT PHRASES FROM JOHN 1:

Answer the following questions.

1. What phrase declares that Jesus Christ is God (John 1:1)?

2. What phrase states clearly that Jesus was also a man (John 1:14)?

D. TWO DIFFERENT GENEALOGIES:

1. What are the differences between the genealogies in the books of Matthew and Luke?
Provide the answers by filling in the blanks.

Matthew 1:1-17

- a. The first person in Matthew's genealogy is _____ and the last is _____.
- b. Matthew's genealogy emphasizes that Jesus is _____.

Luke 3:23-38

- a. The first person in Luke's genealogy is _____ and the last is _____.
- b. Luke's genealogy emphasizes that Jesus is _____.

2. What three women are mentioned in Matthew's genealogy?
_____, _____, and _____.
3. What four things do the genealogies tell you about who Jesus is?
- _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____

E. IMPORTANT TRUTH—JESUS IS PROPHET, PRIEST, AND KING:

Fill in the blanks provided with one of the following words: **Prophet, Priest, King**.

Jesus

1. Because He rules over the whole world, Jesus is the perfect _____.
(Revelation 19:15-16)

2. Because He died for His people's sin, Jesus is the perfect _____.
(Hebrews 5:8-10)

3. Because He spoke God's words, Jesus is the perfect _____.
(Hebrews 1:1-2)

F. THINK ABOUT IT: What does it mean to you that Jesus is your Prophet, Priest, and King?

Chapter 2

Three Angelic Messages

THEME: The Son of Man is fully God and fully man.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 1:18-25a Luke 1:5-79

MEMORY PASSAGE: John 1:1-2

KEY FACTS:

Three Angelic Messages

	Zechariah	Mary	Joseph
Angel's Message	"You will have a son who will turn people back to the LORD." ¹	"You will have a son from the Holy Spirit." ⁵	"Marry Mary because her child is God's Son." ¹⁰
Person's Response	Unbelief: "How can I be sure of this?" ²	Faith: "I am the LORD's servant." ⁶	Obedience: He obeyed God. ¹¹
The Fulfilled Prophecy	"I will send the prophet Elijah before the day of the LORD comes." ³	"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son." ⁷	"Call Him Immanuel." ¹² "He will redeem His people from sin." ¹³
The Child's Name	John: "The LORD is gracious" ⁴	Jesus: "The LORD Saves" ⁸ "Son of the Most High" ⁹	Jesus: "The LORD Saves" ¹⁴ Immanuel: "God with us" ¹⁵

PROPHECY FULFILLED:

A prophet was a person chosen by God to speak God's words to His people. There were two tests of a true prophet:

1. A prophet's words never contradicted what God had said in the past.
2. When a prophet talked about the future, his prophecies always came true.

Malachi and Isaiah were true prophets, and Jesus was the true Prophet.

1. See Luke 1:11-17.

2. See Luke 1:18.

3. See Malachi 4:5.

4. Barker, *NIV Study Bible*, 1535. John is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Yohanan, which means "the LORD is gracious."

5. See Luke 1:31-35.

6. Luke 1:38.

7. Isaiah 7:14.

8. Barker, *NIV Study Bible*, 1422. Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means "the LORD saves."

9. Barker, *NIV Study Bible*, 1422; Luke 1:32.

10. See Matthew 1:20-21.

11. See Matthew 1:24.

12. See Isaiah 7:14.

13. See Psalm 130:8.

14. Barker, *NIV Study Bible*, 1422.

15. Barker, *NIV Study Bible*, 1027. See Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23.

Three Angelic Messages

With reverence and some uneasiness, the old priest Zechariah entered the Holy Place with his two assistants. Only once in a lifetime could a priest offer incense in the temple, and after all these years of serving as a priest, today the lot had finally fallen to Zechariah. His assistants laid the burning coals on the altar, arranged the incense, and withdrew. He was alone in the Holy Place to offer prayers for the people, and he stood still in awe.

Then, without a sound, the angel Gabriel appeared beside the altar. The dim sanctuary shimmered with heavenly radiance, and the old priest, shaken and afraid, fell trembling to the floor.¹⁶

“Don’t be afraid,” the angel said. “The LORD has heard your prayer. Your wife Elizabeth will have a son, and you will call him John. This son will be a joy to you, and in the spirit of Elijah, he will turn many people back to the LORD their God.”¹⁷ (The name John means “the LORD is gracious.”)

How could Zechariah be certain of this? He knew his wife was too old to have a child. He was a man of faith, upright and blameless before the LORD, but this couldn’t be true! He couldn’t believe that he would have a son who would be the fulfillment of the prophet Malachi’s words: “See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me.”¹⁸ The angel was telling him that his son would be the one to announce the coming of the Messiah.¹⁹ Because Zechariah had questioned Gabriel’s message, Gabriel rebuked Zechariah, saying, “Because you did not believe, you will be unable to speak until your son is born.”²⁰ Silent and humbled, Zechariah returned home. Not long after, Elizabeth became pregnant.

In Nazareth, a village in Galilee, the angel Gabriel made another surprise visit, this time to a young unmarried woman named Mary. “You are highly favored by God,” he said. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and you will have a child. He will be called the Son of God. And your relative Elizabeth is having a child in her old age.”²¹ Gabriel told Mary about Elizabeth as a sign to confirm that all that he had said to her was true.

16. See Luke 1:8-12.

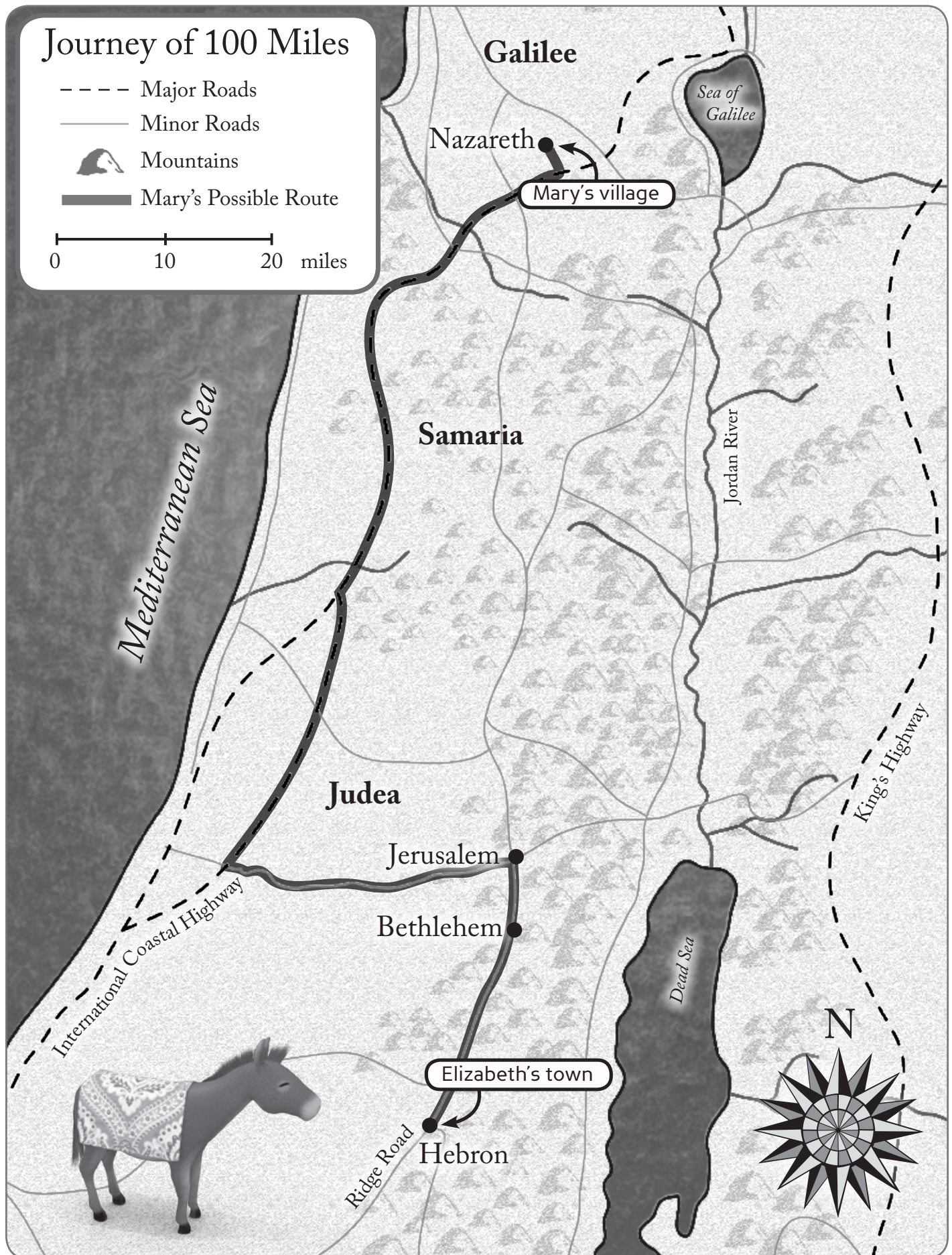
19. See Malachi 4:5-6.

17. See Luke 1:13-17.

20. See Luke 1:19-20.

18. Malachi 3:1.

21. See Luke 1:29-37.



Mary was troubled at these words, but replied, “I am the LORD’s servant.”²² Though she wondered how she could have a child without a husband, Mary knew that nothing was impossible with God. If God said she would have a child whose father was God, Mary would believe Him.

Mary hurried to visit Elizabeth in the hill country of Judea. At the first sound of Mary’s voice, Elizabeth’s baby leaped inside her. “Blessed are you among women,” she exclaimed. “Why would I be so honored to have the mother of the LORD visit me?”²³ Laughing and crying at the same time, the two women hugged each other tightly. So much had happened, their lives so suddenly changed, that the old woman and the young maiden found comfort in each other’s company. Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned to Nazareth.

Meanwhile, back in Nazareth, Joseph, a simple carpenter, had promised to marry Mary. When he learned that Mary was going to have a child, he knew that he was not the father. Because he was righteous, Joseph decided to divorce her without much attention so as not to shame her publicly.²⁴

But after he had considered divorcing Mary, an angel of the LORD came to Joseph in a dream. “Don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife,” he said. “Her child is from the Holy Spirit. You must name him Jesus because He will save His people from their sins.”²⁵ Jesus’ birth fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy: “The virgin shall be with child and will give birth to a son, and He will be called Immanuel.”²⁶ Joseph awoke, confident that what the angel had said was true. He married Mary and accepted the awesome responsibility of being stepfather to the Son of God.²⁷

God had given His Son two names. He called Him Jesus because He was a real man who could get hungry, be tired, and bleed when He scraped His knee. He would live and die to provide salvation for His people. God also called Him Immanuel, which means “God with us,” because this fully human man was also fully divine. Jesus, the Son of Man, was God and man come to earth.

Priest:

Jesus’ name means “the LORD saves.” He is the perfect sacrifice for sin.

Three angelic messages, two remarkable sons, and prophecy fulfilled—everything was ready for God’s redemption story to continue. Zechariah’s son was born, and he named him John. The wait for the Messiah was almost over.

22. Luke 1:38.

23. See Luke 1:42-45.

24. See Matthew 1:18-19.

25. See Matthew 1:20-21.

26. See Isaiah 7:14.

27. See Matthew 1:24.

Review Worksheets

A. KEY FACTS: There were three different angelic messages that received three different responses. Review what happened by filling in the blanks.

Message to Zechariah:

1. Zechariah's response: _____
2. Because of his response, Zechariah couldn't speak until the child was born. When his son was born, Zechariah showed his faith in the LORD in two ways:
 - a. Zechariah called the child _____ (see Luke 1:62-66).
 - b. In his song of praise, Zechariah made it clear that he knew that his son was the fulfillment of prophecy. His son would be called "_____,
_____, " who would go on before the
LORD to "_____ for him" (Luke 1:76).

Message to Mary:

3. Mary's response: _____
4. Mary's words showed that she believed the angel's words.
Mary said, "I am the LORD's _____" (Luke 1:38). In Mary's song of praise, she said, "My soul _____ the LORD, And my spirit has rejoiced in _____ . . . All generations will call me _____ . For He who is _____ has done great things for me" (Luke 1:46-49, NKJV).

Message to Joseph:

5. Joseph's response: _____
6. When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel "_____."
7. Joseph took Mary as his wife. When the child was born, Joseph named Him _____ (see Matthew 1:24-25).

B. STORY FACTS: Circle *all* the *correct* answers.

1. The name John means _____.
 "the LORD is gracious" "God with us" "salvation is from the LORD"
2. Mary lived in the village of _____.
 Hebron Bethlehem Nazareth

3. The two names God gave His Son were _____ and _____.
 Jesus the prophet Elijah Immanuel
4. The prophet _____ said, "I will send my messenger who will prepare the way before me."
 Isaiah Malachi Elijah
5. The angel Gabriel told Mary her son would be called the _____.
 Son of Man Son of the Most High Son of God

C. IMPORTANT TRUTH—JESUS IS GOD AND MAN:

1. Fill in the blanks.
- Jesus is divine because His father is _____ (see Matthew 1:20).
 - Jesus is a man because His mother was _____ (see Luke 1:31).
2. Unscramble the words to find out why Jesus is different from every other person who has ever been born.

Jesus Is . . .

U L F L Y V I N I D E and F Y L U L N U H A M

D. THINK ABOUT IT: Why is it important that Jesus is both God and man?



Chapter 3

The Birth of Jesus

THEME: The Son of Man has a humble beginning on earth.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:1-38

MEMORY PASSAGE: John 1:3-4

KEY FACTS:

From Heavenly Glory to Earthly Poverty

Jesus in Heaven	Jesus on Earth
His Father was Almighty God.	His stepfather was a poor carpenter.
He lived in heavenly splendor.	He was born in a dirty, smelly cave.
Glorious angels served Him.	Only despised shepherds welcomed him.
He created and owned the whole universe.	His family could only afford two pigeons for a sacrifice.
All creatures in heaven worshipped Him.	His people didn't recognize Him as King.

“For you know the grace of our LORD Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”
(2 Corinthians 8:9)

PROPHECY FULFILLED:

God used a Roman emperor and his royal decree to move Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem to fulfill Micah's prophecy, which said, “But you, Bethlehem . . . out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel” (Micah 5:2).



The Birth of Jesus

In due time, Jesus, the King, the Son of Man, was born, and Micah's prophecy was fulfilled: "But you, Bethlehem . . . out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel."¹ This was a prophecy that only a sovereign God could make happen.

Caesar Augustus, the Roman emperor, decreed that a census be taken throughout the Roman Empire. Because Mary and Joseph were descendents of David, they had to go to from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register, even though Mary's baby would soon be

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Bethlehem, meaning "house of bread," was six miles southwest of Jerusalem. It was the birthplace of King David. It was a small town, and before Jesus' birth, nothing important had happened there.

born. Over mountainous roads, they traveled until they arrived at Bethlehem. With dust swirling around them, they pushed through the crowded streets. Because of the emperor's decree, Bethlehem had many visitors. Irritated, noisy people were everywhere. No one noticed the weary couple who were looking for a place for their child to be born.

The innkeeper listened to Joseph's desperate pleas for shelter, and, having nothing else to offer them, he led them to the stable behind the inn. It was only a dirty cave, full of noisy, smelly animals, but it was private. In this cave Jesus was born.

At night in the fields outside Bethlehem, a band of shepherds were watching their sheep. One moment their eyes were droopy with sleep; the next they were blinking from the brightness of an angel-lit sky. "Don't be afraid. I bring good news," the angel said. "Today a Savior is born in Bethlehem who is Christ the Lord."²

Was it true that Christ, the long-awaited Messiah, had been born? Before they could make sense of these words, many angels filled the sky. Their words resounded through the night air, "Glory to God in the highest. Peace on earth to men on whom His favor rests."³

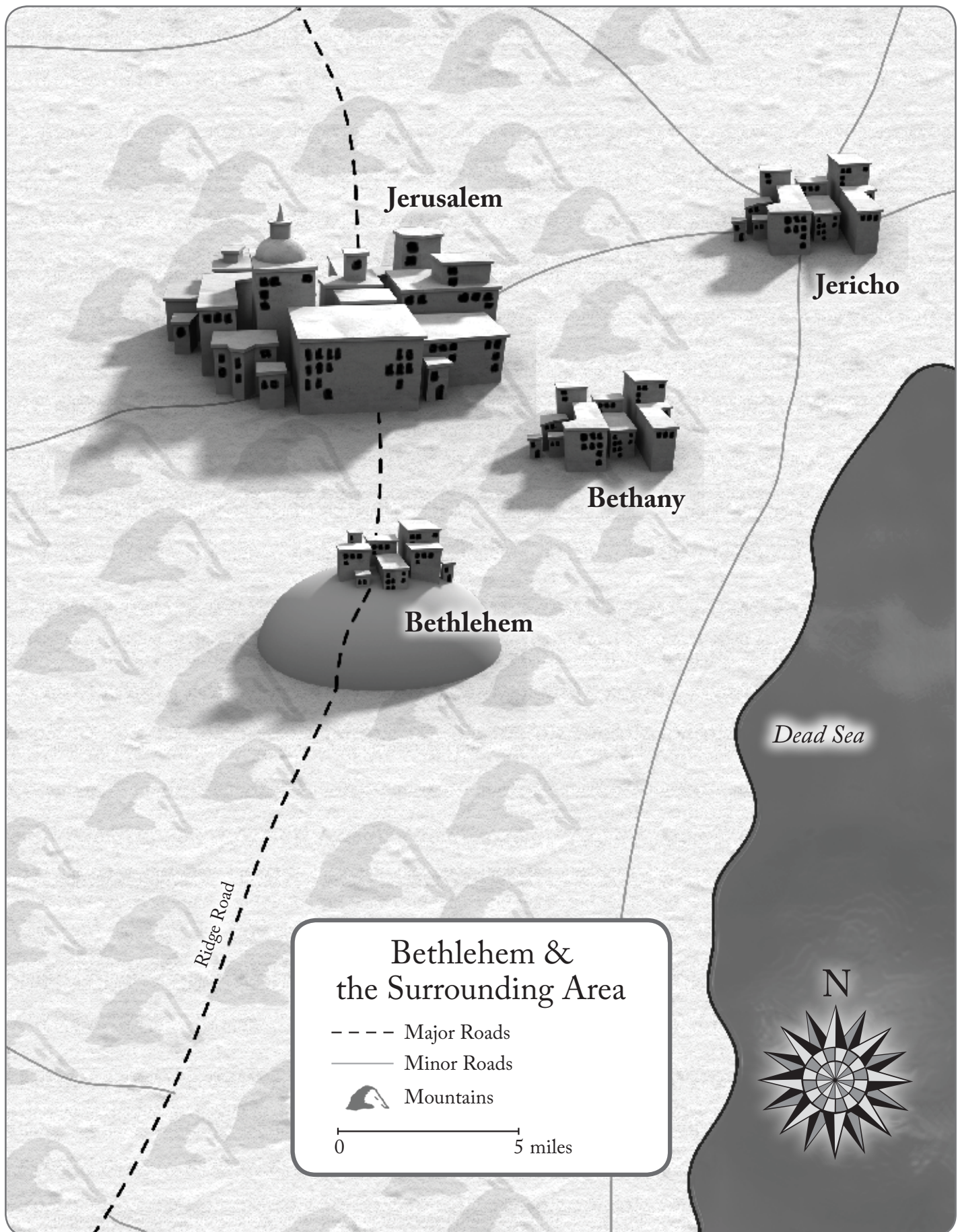
Jesus was God's Son, the King of kings, but He wasn't born in a palace or even an ordinary Jewish house. His birth wasn't announced to King Herod or the priests and rulers of the people. No, the Son of Man was born into a poor family in the humblest of circumstances, and the angels sent shepherds, one of the most despised groups of people, to welcome him.

The shepherds didn't question the angels' message. Leaving their flocks unguarded, they hurried to see this marvel. After visiting Mary and the baby Jesus, they praised God and told everyone what they had heard from the angels and had

1. Micah 5:2.

2. See Luke 2:10-11.

3. Luke 2:14.



seen with their own eyes.⁴ Mary, after the shepherds left, had many things to think about over and over again.⁵

In accordance with Jewish law, Joseph and Mary circumcised the newborn baby when he was eight days old and named Him Jesus, in obedience to the angel Gabriel's command. Of all possible names that the Son of Man could have chosen, He chose Jesus (meaning "the LORD saves"), a name reminding us of God's grace and deliverance from sin.

After forty days, Joseph and Mary went to the temple in Jerusalem to offer the purification sacrifice and consecrate Jesus, their firstborn son, to the Lord. Since they were a poor family, they brought two pigeons for the sacrifice instead of a more expensive lamb.

That day, Simeon, a righteous and devout man in Jerusalem, decided to visit the temple. He was just an ordinary man, but the Lord had told him, "You won't die before you see the Lord's Christ." When he saw the child Jesus at the temple, he knew that Jesus was the Christ. Cradling the baby in his arms, Simeon praised God, saying, "Sovereign Lord, I can now die in peace, for I have seen your salvation. This

Prophet:

As light to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel, Jesus declared God's truth to both Jews and Gentiles.

child will be a light to the Gentiles and a glory to Your people Israel." To Mary, he said, "This child will cause the rising and falling of many people in Israel. He will reveal the thoughts of many hearts, and a sword will pierce your heart, too."⁶

There was also an eighty-four-year-old woman named Anna who never left the temple court. She had been married only seven years when her husband died. Every day since then, she had worshipped day and night in the temple, fasting and praying to the Lord. When she saw baby Jesus, she realized through the Holy Spirit that this child was the Messiah who would bring redemption to Israel. She thanked God, and from that time forward, she encouraged the faithful in Jerusalem to look for God's redemption that had come.⁷ You can imagine that, after all this, Mary had even more things to think about.

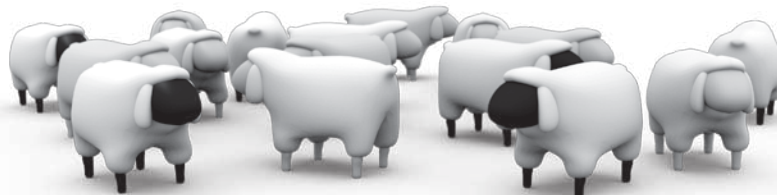
Joseph, Mary, and Jesus returned to Bethlehem, and no one in Bethlehem even knew that the King was living among them.

4. See Luke 2:17, 20.

5. See Luke 2:19.

6. See Luke 2:25-35.

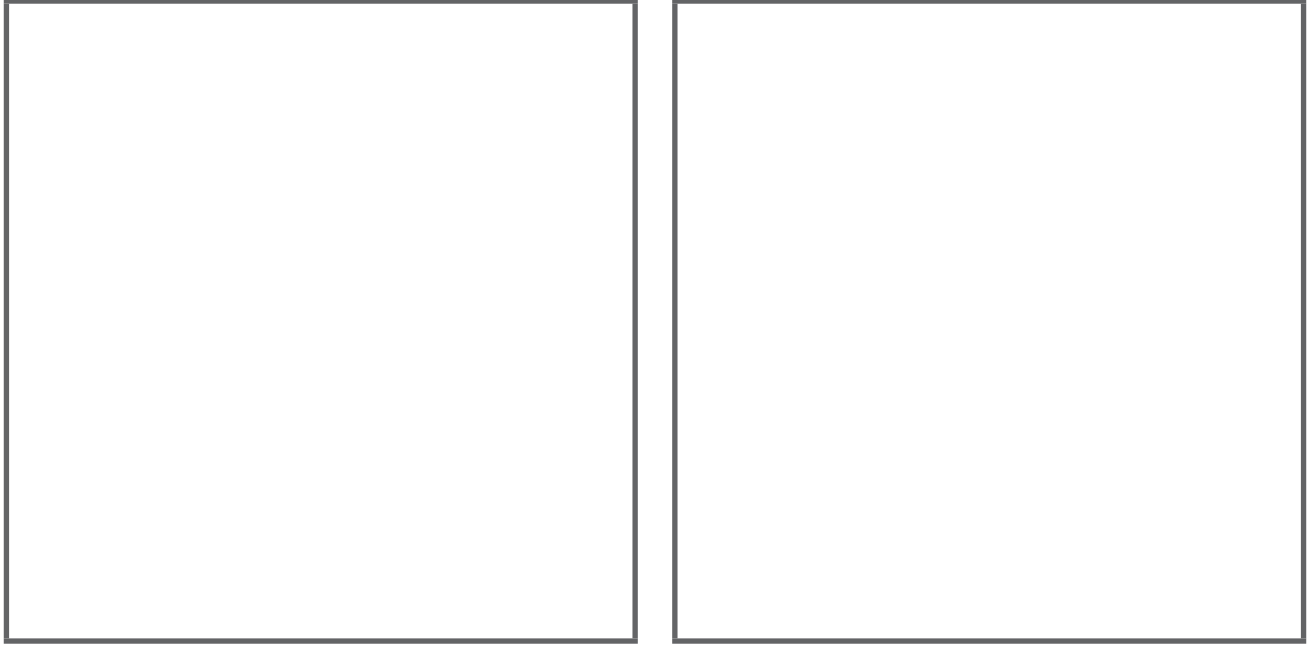
7. See Luke 2:36-38.



Review Worksheets

A. KEY FACTS: In the following boxes, draw two pictures that show Jesus' poverty.

Jesus: Born into Poverty



B. STORY FACTS:

1. Write the letter of the description that best describes the person or group of people listed.

_____ Micah

a. Heard angel's good news message

_____ Caesar Augustus

b. Announced Jesus' birth to shepherds

_____ Shepherds

c. Prayed every day in the temple

_____ Simeon

d. Decreed a census

_____ Angel

e. Prophesied about Jesus' birthplace

_____ Joseph

f. Prophesied about Jesus in temple

_____ Anna

g. Offered pigeons as a sacrifice

2. What do you know about the town of Bethlehem? Write down two facts.

a. _____

b. _____

C. WHAT'S THE REASON? Circle the *correct* answer.

- Joseph went to Bethlehem to register for the census because _____.
 - it was the closest town to Nazareth
 - he was a the descendent of David
 - he had many friends and relatives in Bethlehem
- Joseph and Mary circumcised Jesus at eight days old because _____.
 - the Jewish law required it
 - an angel commanded them to do it
 - Jesus had to be purified from sin
- Simeon said that now he could die in peace because _____.
 - he finally had been forgiven of his sin
 - God had given him a grandson to carry on his name
 - he had seen Jesus and knew He was Christ

D. IMPORTANT TRUTH—JESUS WAS THE MESSIAH:

Unscramble the words to discover God's gospel message.

1. The Angel:

"I bring _____ Today a _____ is
 GODO SWEN RAVIO
 born in Bethlehem who is _____ the Lord."
 STIRCH

2. The Angels:

"_____ to God in the highest. _____ on earth to men on
 LOGYR CEAPE
 whom His _____ rests."
 AVORF

3. Simeon:

"This child will be a _____ to the Gentiles and a glory to
 GLITH
 Your people _____. . . . He will reveal the thoughts of many _____.
 LESRIA THARES

E. THINK ABOUT IT: The word "gospel" means "good news." Why are the messages from the angels and from Simeon good news for you?
