

In the study upon which we are about to embark we shall trace the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ to His own people, the nation of Israel. Such a study will accentuate the love of God for sinners and demonstrate the care that He has for mankind.

Following Christ Through The Gospels

Jesus, along with his brothers and sisters (cf. Mt. 12:46,46; 13:55,56), grew up in the Galilean town of Nazareth. Since no mention is made of His father, Joseph, it is generally understood that he has died. Mary, however, plays an integral role in the upbringing of the family. In His formative years the Lord Jesus worked as a carpenter (Mk. 6:3), but undoubtedly the study of the Word of God was His priority (cf. Lk.2:46ff.).

His ministry began not in the crowded temple area of Jerusalem but in the wilderness beyond Jordan (Jn. 1:28) at Bethabara ('place of crossing'). There John the Baptist introduced Him as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29).

Jesus then, "led by the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 4:1; Mk. 1:12; Lk. 4:1), travelled south-west into the wilderness where He was tempted by the Devil. After forty days He journeyed to His home-territory of Galilee and immediately began to preach the Gospel. The 'carpenter-turned-preacher' began to have a profound effect (Lk. 4:14,15). Note, too, that He "returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee". He went to His own people (Jn. 1:11) and He taught in the synagogues of Galilee. *How important it is to begin our witness for God at home!*

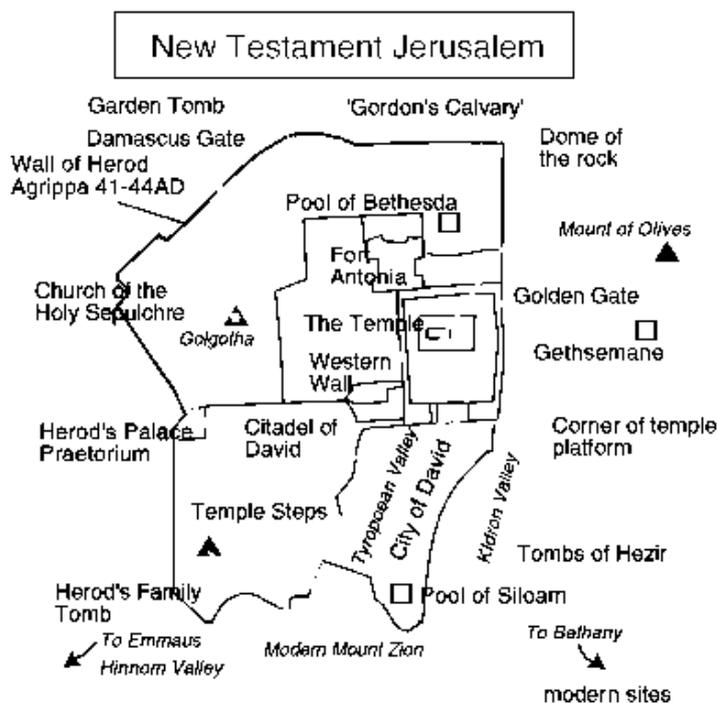
He then travelled to the town of Capernaum which He chose to use as the base of operations for His ministry in Galilee (Mt. 4:13). Teaching in the synagogue (Mark 1:21) and private homes (Mark 2:1) was basic to His work there, but the miracles performed there appear to have precipitated the controversy and opposition.

What exactly did Jesus preach and teach to His countrymen? Remember that He would have known many of them personally, for He had grown up in the area. Nonetheless, He preached the Gospel of repentance (Mt. 4:17) in such a way that His countryfolk were surprised at the depth of His preaching (Mk. 1:22; Lk. 4:32).

Where is the first place that we find Christ having to deal with someone? ... *in the synagogue*, along with the religious people of the town. I wonder for how long this man (Mk. 1:23; Lk. 4:33) had been frequenting this worship-place of the Jews? I wonder if this man had ever before acted like this, or was it because of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ? We discover that this man is demon-possessed and the demons *tremble* in the presence of Christ. "Let us alone", they begged, ... and they knew exactly Who the preacher was, "Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." They hate Him and they fear Him! Jesus Christ is the only Answer to the evil that encapsulates our world! He became an 'overnight sensation'.

In the opening chapters of the Gospels we quickly discover Jesus' daily pattern, - rising up early to pray (Mk. 1:35) in order that He would be suitably equipped to preach the Gospel of Redeeming Grace, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth" (Mk. 1:38).

Great crowds followed Him, but in a *particular* way He called unto Himself the disciples. It was Andrew that made the beautiful discovery and shared it with his brother Simon Peter, "We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ" (Jn. 1:41). Peter, the extrovert, marvelled at the power of Christ on the first fishing expedition and solemnly acknowledged His Lordship (Lk. 5:8). As well as the four fishermen, - James and John from Capernaum, Andrew and Peter from Bethsaida, - there was also Philip and Nathanael, the latter at first being difficult to impress at Nazareth's capability to produce anything of any worth (Jn. 1:46). As Jesus travelled through Galilee He met Matthew, "sitting at the receipt of custom" and He called him into His service (Mt. 9:9) Another disciple, Simon, was a Zealot. Judas Iscariot was the only one of the disciples that belonged to the same Israelite tribe as Jesus, - the tribe of Judah.



In the Galilean town of Cana He changed the water into wine and then travelled to Jerusalem for the Jewish Passover. While in the Temple He overturned the traders' tables (Jn. 2:14-16) in fulfilment of Jer. 7:11. Even in the religious capital during the most religious festival He made His mark (Jn. 2:23-25). In the darkness of the night He met Nicodemus, who along with some of his fellow-Pharisees, had come to the conclusion that Jesus was "a teacher come from God" (Jn. 3:2). Jesus then journeyed northwards, in the direction of Galilee. Normally the Jews crossed into an area known as the Decapolis ("ten cities",

Mt. 4:25; Mk. 5:20; 7:31) so that they would avoid travelling through the ceremonially unclean countryside of Samaria. Sychar, in Samaria, was watered by Jacob's well. However, not a lot of love was lost between the Jews and the Samaritans due to events subsequent to 721 B.C.. Yet, God visited Samaria and many of its inhabitants believed on Christ (Jn. 4:39).

After a two-day 'stop-over' in Samaria Jesus continued on His journey to Galilee. On revisiting Galilee He found the people were still enthusiastic towards Him. Again He went to Cana and healed the child of a nobleman (Jn. 4:46ff.). However, we meet with His frustrations regarding the shallowness of the people's faith (Jn. 4:48).

On His second visit to Jerusalem, - on the Sabbath day, - He visited the pool of Bethesda and worked a miracle of healing that was not appreciated by the Pharisees. In fact they wanted to put Him to death (Jn. 5:16).

On returning to Galilee His popularity remained high. People came from a wide area to be healed and to hear Him preach (Mt. 4:23-25).