

Who is Jesus, Really?

Discover Jesus for yourself.



This short, five-session study is intended for people who want/need to explore, to directly engage, with the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Who was he? What did he do? What did it mean? Is there any meaning for me?

This is designed as a discovery study, rather than a teaching study. Participants read the text, discern what it's saying, and explore its meaning. Other comments are just intended to frame the discussion and provide background.

The prayers at the conclusions of session 2-5 may be used as the leader sees fit. Some participants may not be ready to pray the prayers, but they give language of expression for whenever they might be appropriate.

We believe that God the Holy Spirit will guide us toward Jesus the Way, the Truth, and the Life, if we respond to God's gracious call.

Icons



Scripture



What is?

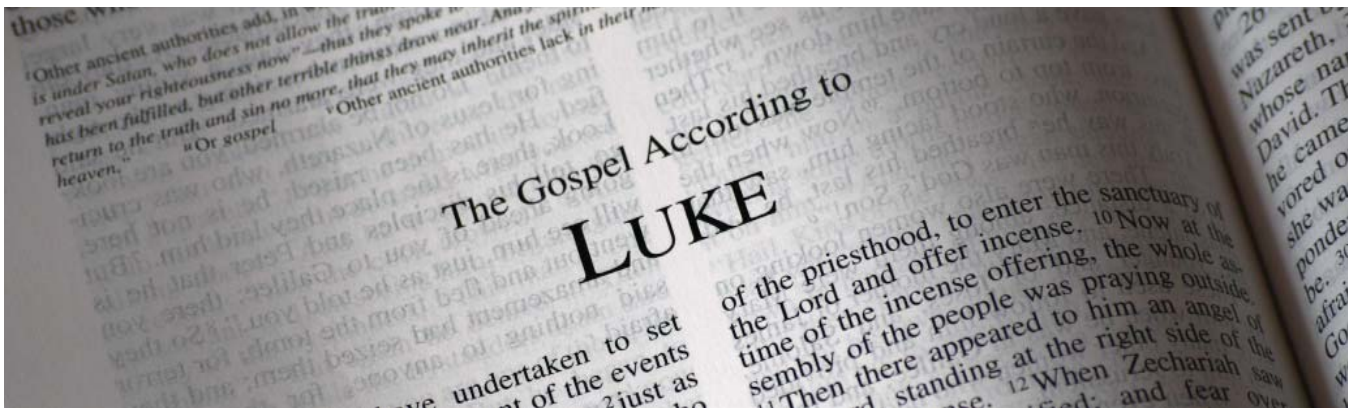


Questions



Think About

Study One - Jesus' Origin and Purpose



The only expansive record that we have of the life of Jesus is found in the Christian Scriptures. There are brief references to “Jesus of Nazareth” in other historical writings of the same time period. The New Testament is made up of several short “gospels” and a number of letters that were circulated among early Christian communities. Our English Bibles are translations of what the early Christians actually wrote.

How can we be sure about the Bible accounts?

In the days of the first Christians, there were many writings about the life of Jesus. But some had special quality--they had been written by Jesus’ direct followers or their close friends. These gospels and letters were carefully copied by hand onto scrolls and codices maybe of papyrus and vellum, which decay over time – so they were copied over and over through the centuries. Archaeologists have found thousands of these bits of the New Testament in their earliest form, as well as complete copies. By comparing these, we can have a very good idea of what the New Testament writers originally wrote. Some of these “copies” are dated less than 100 years after the original gospel or letter was written.

For an idea of how good this evidence is, compare the New Testament with other writings that are about as old as the New Testament. For example, Julius Caesar wrote a book called *The Gallic War* about 50 years before Jesus was born. We obviously do not have the original copy. Yet, we do have nine or ten copies, and the earliest of these was made about 900 years after the original. This is a typical gap for ancient writings. However, when we examine the historical evidence relating to the Christian Scriptures, we learn that there are thousands of early manuscripts of the New Testament writings. Therefore, we have good reason to believe that we know almost exactly what Luke, Paul, and the others, wrote.

Who wrote the gospel of Luke?

The author of this gospel, Luke, also wrote another book in the New Testament, the *Acts of the Apostles*. He was the only New Testament writer who was not Jewish (probably Greek) and he was a physician. Independent evidence confirms that he was a very careful and accurate historian.



What's a "gospel?" Gospel is an old English word for what is written in Greek as: good news. Think of the Gospel of Luke as a background, feature-length, newspaper or magazine article about a significant historical event that was viewed as "good news." Think of this headline: "Nazi Germany surrenders to Allied Forces." Fantastic news if you were living in Britain in 1945. Thirty years later, young people who were born after the war needed a longer explanation of what actually happened, and why that headline was "good news." Luke's Gospel is like that.

Luke's Gospel: fact or fiction?



Read Luke 1:1-4



- Where did Luke get his information? (1:2)
- How did he write it? (1:3)
- Why does Luke say that he wrote this account?

Where did Jesus come from?

Luke gives details of the unique origin of Jesus, and the following passage explains how Jesus' birth was foretold.



Read Luke 1:26-38



- What does the angel say about Mary's child? (1:32,33)
- How would Jesus be conceived? (1:35-37)
- Jesus is said to be "the Son of God." What do these verses say about Jesus' "double" origin?

Jesus explains his purpose

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in the south of Palestine. He grew up in a very ordinary town, named Nazareth, located in Galilee which was in the north of Palestine. Jesus was a carpenter, but at the age of 30, he became a religious teacher, moving from town to town. In Luke 4:14-22, we read what happened when Jesus began teaching. He went to the synagogue in his home town, Nazareth. Although he probably had no more religious education than the average Jewish man, people wanted to hear him.



Read Luke 4:14-22



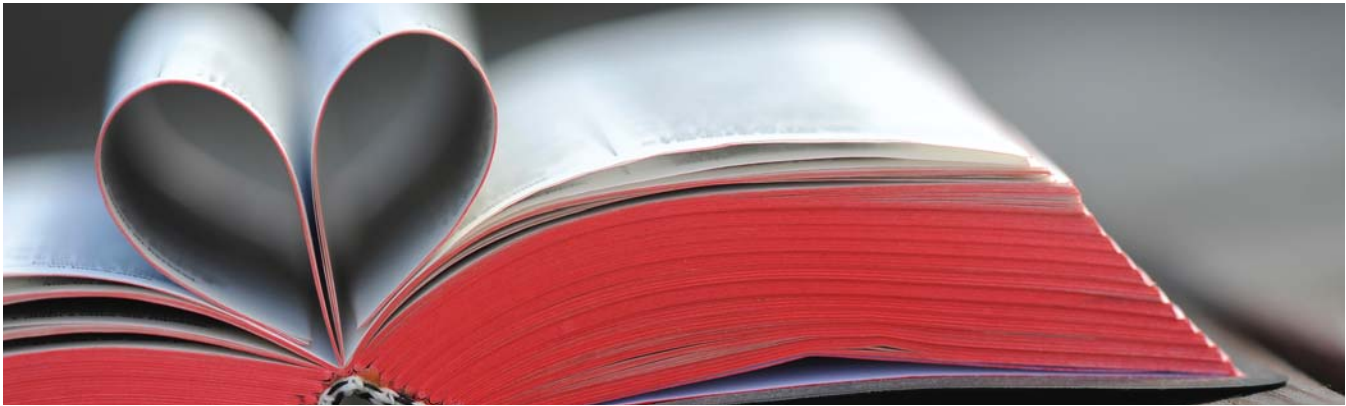
- Jesus says that the passage he read is speaking about himself (v.21).
- What kinds of people are named in this reading? (4:18)
- What do you think this means?
- What was he going to announce? (4:19)
- What does this mean: "the year of the Lord's favour?"
- What do you think the people in the synagogue understood when he said the words in verse 21?

TO THINK ABOUT



Jesus says, in effect, that he came to radically change (transform?) the situation of the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed. This was like a manifesto of his intentions. Do you identify yourself with any of the people in those life situations? What do you make of the story so far? Are you interested in another session, taking the story a bit further?

Study 2 - Jesus the Healer



In the first study, we saw that Jesus was not just an unusual person; the angel said he was God's Son. He came into the world in order to transform the deepest needs of all human beings. In this study, we will look at how Jesus engaged with the deep needs of two particular people. Everywhere Jesus went, he came across needy people. Often, the people he met had incurable diseases. He was able to change their physical lives by healing them. More importantly, he changed their spiritual lives through forgiveness of their sins. What is meant by "sins?" In the Old Testament the original Hebrew word, for which the English translation uses sin, refers to "missing the mark" – as in "the archer missed his target."

The Greek word in the New Testament has a similar meaning, coupled with the understanding that human nature seems to be warped in such a manner that it is impossible to consistently hit the mark of God's desire for us. Jesus' offer of forgiveness applies to our thoughts and actions that "miss the mark." Jesus' offer of healing is directed at restoring our warped and struggling inner nature. Jesus healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law, a Roman officer's servant, a man with a paralyzed hand, a crippled woman, a paralyzed man, people suffering from spiritual and mental disorders or skin diseases, blind people, and he even raised the dead. "All who had friends who were sick with various diseases brought them to Jesus; he placed his hands on every one of them and healed them all" (Luke 4:40). Look at how Jesus interacted with these people.

A blind beggar is healed



Read Luke 18:35-43



- What do you think life was like for this blind man?
- Why do you think he kept calling for Jesus?
- What did Jesus do and say once he had heard the man? (18:40-42)
- In what way did the man show he believed in Jesus?
- If you had seen this miracle, what would you have thought of Jesus?

This was a blind man to whom Jesus gave “recovery of sight” (Luke 4:18). He healed many people of different physical illnesses. But he also healed people from other forms of “sickness.”

Jesus and Zacchaeus

The Romans gave the job of collecting taxes to the highest bidder. Tax collectors did not get any wages for their work. They collected as much money as they could so there would be plenty left over for themselves after paying the government. Zacchaeus was one of these tax collectors. He was a greedy and unpopular man.



Read Luke 19:1-10



- What was Zacchaeus’ attitude toward Jesus? (19:3,4,6)
- Many people grumbled about Jesus talking to such a man. What was Jesus’s attitude toward Zacchaeus? (19:5,9,10)
- How did Zacchaeus change after meeting Jesus? (19:8)
- What do you think Jesus meant by “the lost”? How does that idea apply to Zacchaeus? (19:10)
- What does this incident show about the character and purpose of Jesus?

TO THINK ABOUT



Which story do you connect with more? Are you at a place where you need healing in some area of your life; mind, spirit, or body? Or are there some warped or struggling areas of your life that you need to get straightened out with God? Perhaps this is a prayer that we could pray:

God, I need the kind of healing that Jesus offered to the blind man and Zaccheus. Please give me eyes to see you. Please come to my house and spend time with me, so that I can see the truth. Amen.



What is prayer? Prayer is simply entering into a posture of dialogue with God. One way that God speaks to human beings is through the stories that God inspired in the Old and New Testaments. These Scriptures flesh out God’s character and desires for human beings. Prayer is our response back to God. Just like a conversation.

Study 3 - Jesus the Teacher



In the last study, we looked at Jesus the Healer. But people didn't come just to be healed by him; they also wanted to listen to him. Large crowds from all over the country would come to hear what he had to say. He talked about: God's Kingdom, prayer, wise and foolish lifestyles, love and forgiveness, and also himself.

Not everyone liked Jesus' teaching. He was outspoken against religious leaders who were hypocrites. He had enemies who tried to trick him with questions, but he always managed to give wise answers. Even when the religious leaders wanted to kill Jesus, they found it hard because the crowds wanted to listen to his teaching – “not wanting to miss a single word” (Luke 19:48). In this study, we will discuss two of the best known parables (stories which teach biblical truth) that Jesus told.

The Merciful Samaritan

What would you say are the most important things in life?

Many people went to Jesus with their important questions. For one man, his concern focused on what would happen to him after his death. He asked Jesus how he could “receive eternal life.” Jesus got the man to answer it himself, from the Scriptures (Luke 10:27).



Read Luke 10:25-28



- What did the man say were the two most important things in life? (10:27)
- What do you think of the man's answers? What would you say are the most important things in life?
- Jesus was then asked, “Who is my neighbour?” He answered by telling the story of the good Samaritan.



Read Luke 10:29-37



- What did the priest and Levite (Temple lay leader) do that was wrong? (10:31,32)
- Did they disobey the principle “I never do anyone any harm”?
- Did they break the Law? Due to their religious and cultural upbringing, Jews looked upon the Samaritans (a mixed race community) with contempt. How did the Samaritan in this parable show love and mercy?

If you were in the crowd listening to this exchange, how would you understand the meaning of this story?

Jesus acts as a merciful Samaritan towards us. Someone who was rejected and treated poorly (put to death!) by the religious and political authorities, with the agreement of common people. Yet, Jesus sees our needs, struggles, and failures, and instead of passing by (because we passed him by), he reaches out with love and compassion.

The lost son

This is a simple story, yet one of the greatest in the world of literature. It takes the problems that often arise between people to illustrate how men and women react toward God.



Read Luke 15:11-32



- What do you think the younger son was thinking as he left home? (15:12,13)
- Where did he go? (15:13)
- How do you think the father felt when his son had gone?
- Things went fine for a while. What happened when things got bad? (15:14-16)
- The son changed his mind. Why? (15:17)
- How did he show that his attitude had changed? (15:18-20)
- What was the father's attitude? (15:20, 22-24)

In what ways do you think this story could be a picture of a person's relationship with God? Which do you identify with more: the attitude of the son as he left home or his attitude when he decided to return?

TO THINK ABOUT



Can you believe that God would accept you as completely as the father accepted his son? You may be at a point in your life where you know that you need God, and want to return to Him. Perhaps you would like to pray:

Father God, I admit I have wandered away from you, and I have fallen short of your best intentions for me. I have not loved you or other people as I should. I realize that my "*falling short*" deserves the separation from you that I experience. I want to come back to you now, just as the lost son came back to his father. Amen.

Study 4 - Jesus as Mediator and Redeemer.



At the trial of Jesus it seemed that both the weak-willed Roman governor, Pilate, and the shouts of the crowd sent Jesus to death. In fact, the Bible tells us that these events, amazingly, formed part of God's purpose from the very beginning of time. Before his crucifixion Jesus took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, "Listen! We are going to Jerusalem where everything the prophets wrote about the Son of Man will come true. He will be handed over to the Gentiles, who will make fun of Him, insult Him, and spit on Him. They will whip him and kill Him, but on the third day he will rise to life." The disciples did not understand any of these things. (Luke 18:31-34a).

The Passover meal and "The Last Supper"

On the last night of his life, Jesus ate a meal with his disciples.



Read Luke 22:7-20



- What do you think the atmosphere was like during that meal?
- What did Jesus say about the bread and cup of wine? (22:19,20)
- What do you think Jesus meant when he said his body was "given for you," and his blood was "poured out for you"?

The Trial

After the Passover meal, Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, and was taken before the Jewish ruling council.



Read Luke 22:66-71



- What did the Jewish leaders want to find out from Jesus?
- What did Jesus tell them?
- How did the Jewish leaders respond? (22:71)

The Cross

Jesus was not condemned to death for anything he had done. He was condemned for who he claimed to be.



Read Luke 23:32-49



- What did the following groups say about Jesus:
- Jewish leaders? (v.35)
- Soldiers? (v.36)
- The criminal? (v.39)
- How was the second criminal's reply different from that of the first? (23:39-42)
- What did he recognize about Jesus?
- What did the army officer say when Jesus died? (23:47)
- What do you think Jesus' attitude was while he was being crucified? (23:34,43,46)



What's a Mediator and Redeemer? A mediator is someone who attempts to help people involved in a conflict come to an agreement; a go-between. To redeem means to buy something back, to recover something by payment; like something traded in at a pawn store and then "redeemed" later on. Jesus' action as Mediator involved willingly, in love, offering himself as the solution for the conflict between God and ourselves. His action resolved the conflict, redeeming our "indebted" relationship with God, for all of our warped "falling short."

TO THINK ABOUT



As the criminal on the cross beside Jesus faced his own death, he asked Jesus to remember him in his future Kingdom. Jesus promised that the man would be with Him that day in Paradise. In what ways can we have the same hope as the criminal did after hearing Jesus' words? Perhaps we could pray this prayer:

Jesus, I understand why you had to die for my short fallings. I realize that you chose to offer yourself to death, as mediator, with love and compassion for me. Like the man beside you on the cross, I accept your gracious offer to redeem me, and want to be with you, wherever you take me. Amen.

Study 5 - **Jesus as Giver of hope, peace, joy, purpose, and eternal life.**



The last chapter of Luke gives a clear account of the resurrection of Jesus. After Jesus' crucifixion his disciples were afraid of the Jews. While they continued to meet, they did so in secret. Suddenly, Jesus showed up in the midst of their gathering.

C.S. Lewis, a famous writer and Christian, wrote:

“The New Testament writers speak as if Christ’s achievement in rising from the dead was the first event of its kind in the whole history of the universe. He has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought and beaten the king of death.”

The Resurrection

How do you think the disciples felt after seeing Jesus crucified?



Read Luke 24:1-48



- The women discover Jesus' body gone (v1-12)
- The two men on the road to Emmaus (v13-35)
- Jesus appears to all the disciples (v36-48)
- The two on the road said that they were surprised by the news (v.22) and Jesus himself confirmed that they had doubts in their minds (v.38). Nevertheless, various people became convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead.
- What convinced the women? (24:5-8)
- What convinced the two people on the road? (24:25-32)
- What convinced the group of disciples? (24:33-43)



Read Luke 24:48-53



- How did the disciples' attitude toward Jesus change? (24:52,53)

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was the climax of his life's work. Jesus rose from the dead as he said he would. This historical fact challenges us to believe that the other things he said about himself are also true. The resurrection demands a response from us, one way or another.

Responding to Jesus

Let's look at one particular woman about whom Luke wrote, and see how she responded to Jesus.



Read Luke 7:36-50



This woman had a difficult, shame-filled, “falling short” kind of life. Her behaviour toward Jesus was very different from the stiff and starchy response of Simon the Pharisee.

- Why do you think the woman acted as she did? (7:37,38)
- Jesus told Simon a story to explain the woman's actions. (7:40-43)
- Why do you think he did that?
- How were the woman's debts cleared before God? (7:48)
- What does “faith” mean? (7:50)
- What did “go in peace” mean to this woman? (7:50)

She could be sure that she was at peace with God. Jesus had welcomed, accepted and forgiven her because of his love and mercy. Nothing she had done could have earned his response. But she was now free to live as a new person. We can be sure in this same way. We can never pay God the debt we owe Him for the gift of His Son. But, if we come to Jesus as this woman did, we can know that he forgives and accepts us completely. In the last session we discussed how this happens through Jesus' death on our behalf

Becoming a Jesus-follower

The woman, who fell so short of God's desire for her life, came to Jesus and recognized her need for forgiveness and healing. She trusted Jesus to forgive her and, by her actions, thanked him for the new life he offered her. Each one of us must realize that living a good, moral or “religious” life will not make us acceptable to God.

To begin a relationship with God, you could pray something like this:

God, I realize that I have been running my own life and have rebelled against you. I admit that I have fallen short of your desire for my life and that I don't deserve anything from you. Thank you for the gift of Jesus' sacrifice, offering his life for mine, that I might be forgiven, healed and restored. I open my life to you and ask you to be my Healer and my Life Director. Mold me into the kind of person you want me to be. Amen.

Growing as a Jesus-follower



Read Luke 6:46-49



A decision to become a Jesus-follower is just the beginning of a lifetime of getting to know God better. As you get to know God by reading what is spoken to us about God's character and intentions (The Bible), you will gain assurance of God's healing and renewal in your life – inner thoughts and outward actions.

This study guide was developed and compiled by Dan Sheffield, with insights from the following materials:

<http://www.whoisjesus-really.com/english/studyd.htm>

The Case for Christ, Lee Strobel

Simply Good News, N T Wright