

Jesus Bible Study Series

Week #3 (Chapter Five)
Life... as God Intended It

HMR
Men's Bible Study

Main Idea

A careful study of Scripture reveals that Jesus was not only a fulfillment of almost 500 Old Testament prophecies, but He was able to live a sinless life as a man, serve as the perfect Passover Lamb, and finally prove Himself to be the legitimate shepherd King in overcoming the trappings that had befallen all of Israel's prior leaders.

Deep Thoughts

Every stage of Jesus' time on earth was purposeful and intended to bring glory and honor to God. Scripture is generally silent on His life between the age of 12 and his baptism in A.D. 26 (Jesus was likely born 6/5 B.C.), although Luke tells us that during this time He grew in favor with God and man. When Jesus emerges on the scene at His Baptism, we observe that He knows who was meant to be. There is no assembly of counselors or polls to provide guidance for Him, His only source of direction came from God. Jesus was not a wishy-washy reluctant leader who needed the approval of men, but rather He lived with confidence in knowing what He had been called to do. We are all challenged by the model of leadership portrayed by Jesus. Around us there are so many examples of poor leadership (especially those who are elected to serve in public office). Many leaders today are the antithesis of Jesus' model that exhibited honor, integrity, well-grounded confidence, humility, and selflessness. As Believers, we can have confidence in knowing that our Leader always has our best interests at heart, even when it hurts us (and Him). We can live the abundant life of which He so often spoke by trusting in His leadership and the direction He has for our lives. Our world desperately needs men and women who are called by God to follow Jesus to do His work wherever He calls, whenever He calls, and however He calls. Only when we get to the point where His direction is at the forefront of our thoughts will we become the Believers He has called us to be. Until then we are likely to live in frustration and disappointment. In this series we continue our focus on *abiding in Christ by understanding who He was, who He is, and who He calls us to be.*

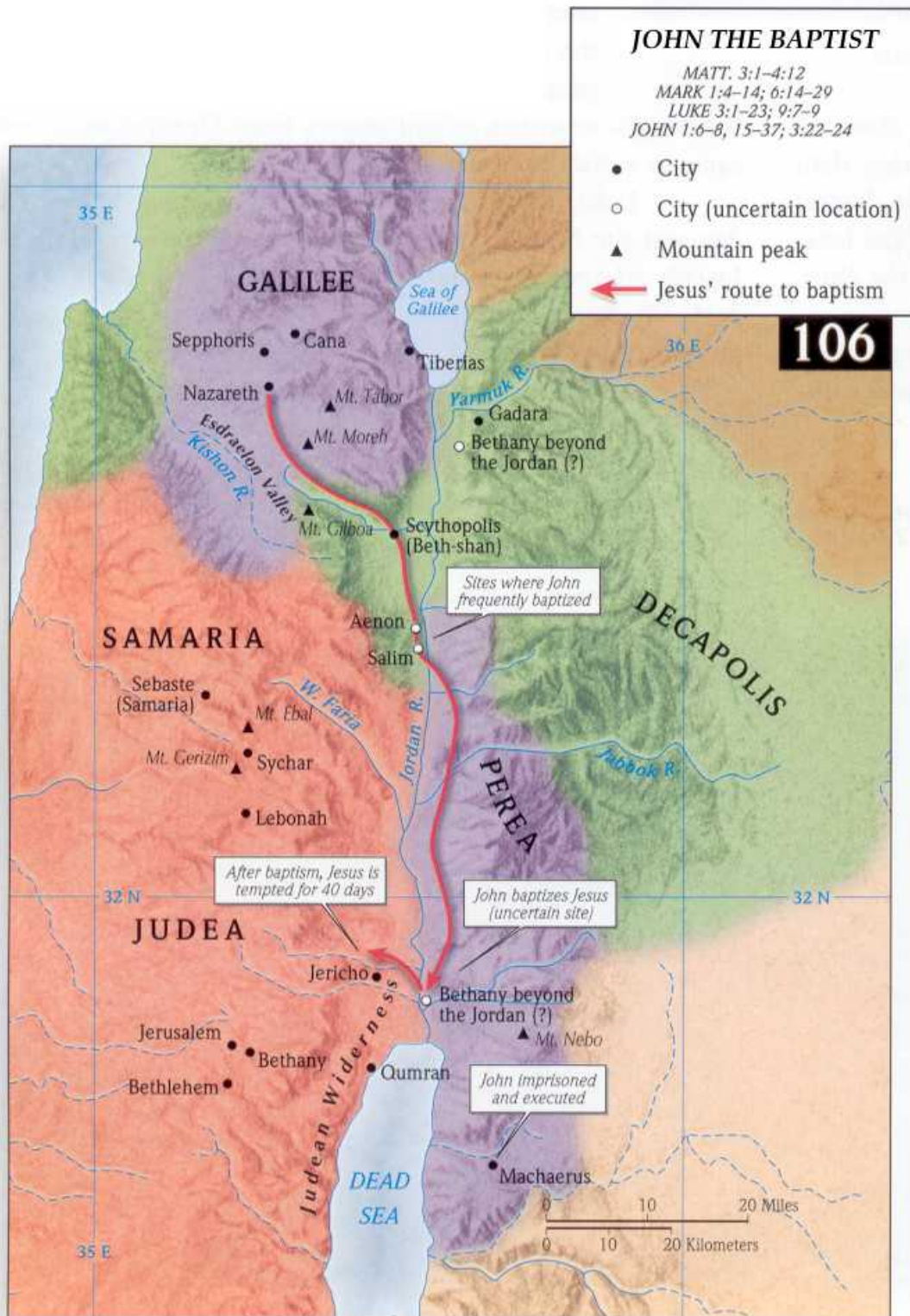
Supporting Scriptures

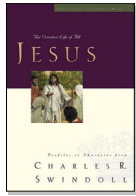
Read the following Scripture passages and consider Jesus' example as a leader and His encouragement for living an abundant life.

- Matthew 3:13-17 (The Baptism of Jesus)
- Luke 4:1-13 (The Temptation of Jesus)
- John 3:1-21 (Jesus teaches Nicodemus)

Questions for Consideration

1. Consider Jesus' responses in Luke 4 to the Temptation. In our lives today, provide specific answers in how we are tempted and how Jesus' responses based on Old Testament passages can help us resist temptation.
 - a. It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone'
 - b. It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'
 - c. It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'
2. John 3:16 is the most quoted Bible verse in the world, but few understand that it came from Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus in the dark of night. What was so radically different about Jesus' approach to salvation relative to Nicodemus's beliefs based on what he read in the Old Testament? What role does grace play in salvation?
3. Read the **Abundance Now** section on pages 76-77. Consider each of the four "tangible qualities" listed by Dr. Swindoll regarding the abundant life that Jesus offers: soaring, ignoring, risking, and releasing. What happens in our own lives when we engage in these qualities, but also when we shirk (i.e. fail to live up to) them.





Jesus Bible Study Series

Week #3 (Chapter Six)

Resting in Christ

HMR
Men's Bible Study

Main Idea

Legalism is diametrically opposed to grace. There is no greater danger that exists in the church today. Legalism focuses so much on the “worthiness” of man (i.e. works) and so little on the grace of God through Jesus. As Paul wrote in Romans 11:6: *And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.* As Jesus so often debated with the religious leaders of His day, God is fundamentally concerned with our heart and what motivates us in our service to Him. Legalism might look good on the outside, but it is exhausting, and God knows the truth ANYWAY (and in the end others will eventually figure out our motivation as well).

Deep Thoughts

Being a “recovering legalist” I understand better than most the dangers that exist for the church today in being legalistic. On the other hand, I sense a movement in today's church that has nothing to do with legalism, but rather an exact opposite environment where Believers are no longer challenged to be holy with many pastors preaching an “anything goes” message. This is even worse than legalism and is merely the pendulum on the other side of the centerline. Notwithstanding the current dysfunctions of the church in America, we should oppose legalism for the mere reason that Jesus opposed it.

Ofentimes one of the unstated purposes in legalism is attempting to keep members in the church holy. While this in and of itself is admirable, dangers exist when imposing rules on members of the church that are not explicitly defined in Scripture. The tendency in making “black and white” what God has made “gray” is to create divisions in the church observed in the “haves” and the have-nots.” The Biblical option (and surprisingly, better option!) is for the mature Believers in the church to model and pray for those in the faith who are developing and not impose unnecessary burdens on those not ready for heavier yokes. Let's let the Holy Spirit do His job and worry less about others by focusing on our own personal development. In the end we will all be better off. In this series we continue our focus on *abiding in Christ by understanding who He was, who He is, and who He calls us to be.*

Supporting Scriptures

Read the following Scripture passages and consider Jesus' stern warnings to the legalists of His day and the benefits associated in living in the freedom of grace.

- Mark 2:23-28 (Jesus and eating grain on the Sabbath)
- Matthew 11:28-30 (the light yoke of Jesus)
- Romans 5:1-21 (entire chapter, Death through Adam, Life through Christ and the resulting peace and joy)

Questions for Consideration

1. Look at the table on the back page. There were numerous religious and political factions during the time of Jesus. However, four of the more prominent and influential groups are listed in this table (note the highlighted points). Briefly describe each.
2. What are some of the divisions that exist in the church today and what caused these divisions? How many of these divisions come from misunderstandings (or worse yet, ignorance) of Scripture?
3. A.W. Tozer said, *It is doubtful whether God can **ble**ss a man greatly until He has **hur**t him deeply.* On pages 89-90 Dr. Swindoll talks about the humility of Matthew and writes, *Almost nothing can penetrate the emotional armor worn by those who have been beaten down by the morality of the righteous. Almost nothing. Jesus, the only thoroughly righteous man, knew the secret. He knew the only way to penetrate the sheath of calloused emotions was to extend grace.* Why is humility so critically important in the life of a Christian and how are we able to impact others when we exhibit humility?

At our next meeting (Tuesday, February 18th) we'll cover Chapters 7 and 8 of our book.

Jewish Groups at the Time of Jesus

To understand the New Testament properly, especially the life of Jesus as presented in the Gospels, we need to learn about the wide variety of different Jewish groups that existed in the first century. Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, describes three major Jewish groups and their "philosophies" or ways of life: Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. He also mentions various other political and revolutionary groups of Jews active in the first century CE, especially during the first War against Rome. The New Testament mentions Pharisees and Sadducees (but not Essenes) in addition to various other identifiable groups, four of which are described in the table below.

<p>Pharisees - a group of influential Jews active in Palestine from 2nd century BCE through 1st century CE; they advocated and adhered to strict observance of the Sabbath rest, purity rituals, tithing, and food restrictions based on the Hebrew Scriptures and on later traditions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Pharisees" probably means "separated ones" in Hebrew, referring to their strict observance of laws and traditions (Luke 18:10-12).l • Long-time political and religious rivals of the Sadducees, vying for influence among the rulers and the people. • Mostly laymen, but possibly also some priests (from the tribe of Levi) or even members of the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:34). • Followed not only the laws of the Hebrew Bible, but also the "traditions of the elders" (Mark 7:1-13; Matt 15:1-20). • Leaders were called "rabbis" or "teachers", such as Nicodemus (John 3:1-10; 7:50; 19:39) and Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3). • Also had trained "scribes" (Mark 2:16; Acts 23:9) and "disciples" (Mark 2:18; Matt 22:16; Luke 5:33). • NT Gospels portray them mainly as opponents of Jesus (Mark 8:11; 10:2), who conspire with the Herodians to kill Jesus (Mark 3:6). • Some of Jesus' harshest polemics are directed against the "hypocrisy" and "blindness" of the Pharisees (Matt 23; John 9). • In contrast to Sadducees (Mark 12:18-27), Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:1-8). • Paul himself was a Pharisee (Phil 3:5; Acts 23:6; 26:5), as were some other early Christians (Acts 15:5). 	<p>Sadducees - another prominent group of Jews in Palestine from 2nd century BCE through 1st century CE; they were probably smaller "elite" group, but even more influential than the Pharisees; they followed the laws of the Hebrew Bible (the Torah), but rejected newer traditions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Sadducees" comes from the Hebrew tsaddiqim ("righteous ones"), which may refer to the way they wished to live their lives. • The name may also derive from Zadok, the high priest under King David (1 Kings 1:26), since many Sadducees were priests. • Long-time political and religious rivals of the Pharisees, although their influence was more with the wealthy ruling elites. • Probably also rivals of the Herodians, since they had supported the Hasmonean Jewish rulers against King Herod. • Closely associated with the Jerusalem Temple and with the ruling council ("Sanhedrin") of the Jews (Acts 4:1; 5:17; 23:6). • Did not believe in life after death (Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27) or in angels or spirits (Acts 23:8). • NT Gospels portray them (often together with the Pharisees) mainly as opponents of Jesus (Matt 16:1-12; Mark 18:12-27). • But they also rejected the teachings of the Pharisees, esp. their oral traditions and newer innovations.
<p>Essenes - a smaller group or "sect" that lived a communal "monastic" lifestyle at Qumran (near the Dead Sea) from 2nd century BCE through 1st century CE; the "Dead Sea Scrolls" found in this location in 1947 are usually associated with them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Originally a group of priests, founded and/or led by a "Teacher of Righteousness" during the early Maccabean/Hasmonean era. • Regarded the Jerusalem priests as illegitimate, since those were not Zadokites (from the family of the high priest Zadok). • They rejected the validity of the Temple worship, and thus refused to attend the festivals or support the Jerusalem Temple. • They expected God to send a great prophet and two different "Messiahs" (anointed leaders), one kingly and one priestly. • They lived a communitarian life with strict membership requirements, rules, and rituals; they probably also practiced celibacy. • Mentioned by Josephus, but not in the NT (although some scholars think the "Herodians" in the NT refer to Essenes). • Monastery destroyed by the Roman Army ca. 68 AD, during the Jewish War against Rome, which Essenes probably considered the final battle between the forces of good (the true Israelites) and evil (the Romans and their collaborators). • Dozens of complete scrolls and thousands of written fragments were discovered from 1947 to the mid-1950's in caves near Qumran. • The Scrolls contain copies of almost the entire Hebrew Bible, some older non-canonical texts, and dozens of the Essenes own writings. 	<p>Zealots - one of several different "revolutionary" groups in the 1st century CE who opposed the Roman occupation of Israel.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Zealots" were probably not an organized group at first, but any Jews "zealous" for God's law (Num 25:13; 1 Kings 19:10; Acts 22:3; Gal 1:14). • Just before and during the First Jewish War against Rome, "Zealots" were a nationalistic revolutionary party opposed to the Romans. • One of Jesus' apostles (not the same as Simon Peter) is called "Simon the Zealot" in Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13 (but "Simon the Cananaean" in Mark 3:18 & Matt 10:4). He may have belonged to a revolutionary group before joining Jesus, but more likely was "zealous" in the older sense.