

FIRST YEAR OF MINISTRY

EARLY JUDEAN MINISTRY (8-9 MONTHS)—

JOHN 2:13—4:2

Jerusalem and Judea

Jerusalem! Jerusalem! Those words bring many, many important things to mind: David, its great king—Jeremiah, who wept over it. But a greater than Jonah or the temple, or these two men, could not bring it to its knees in repentance. Oh, Jerusalem!

The feast of Passover brought orthodox Jews together yearly. Jesus etched this Passover (A.D. 27?) on the minds of many who no doubt watched with eyes wide as He cleaned house, and warned about making the temple a place of merchandise. The enigmatic remarks about destruction of His body were remembered, as the trial accounts testify.

The account in John, extending through 4:3, contains some important teaching about the potential citizen of the kingdom, the king of the kingdom, and the forerunner of the king.

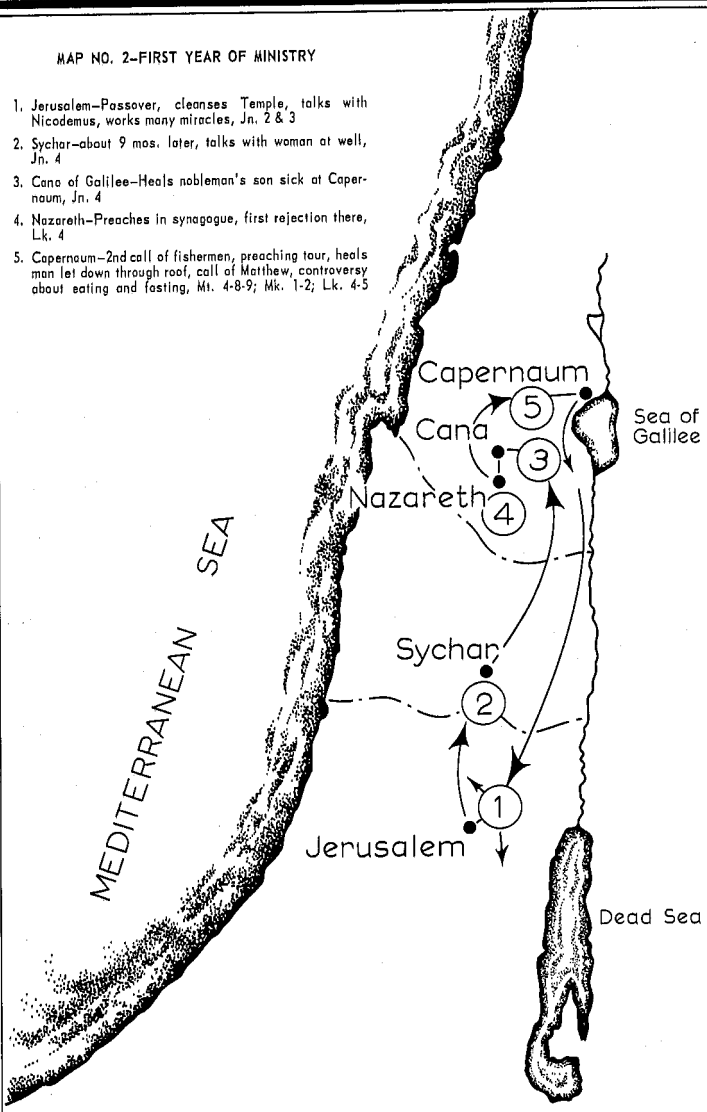
The ministry of Jesus is a many-splendored thing, and yet it constantly emphasizes one fact: God directed it entirely. Men would have misused it in some way, and because Jesus knew the makeup of His creation, He would not allow His ministry to be directed by man.

The obvious result of a ministry with God's help is stated by Nicodemus in 3:2. People like the disciples, Simeon and Anna, and others could see this fact, even if some would not see it. A number of the Pharisees believed in Jesus, Saul of Tarsus ultimately among them.

We do not know why this ruler of the Jews came by night to Jesus. We do know that he finally committed

MAP NO. 2—FIRST YEAR OF MINISTRY

1. Jerusalem—Passover, cleanses Temple, talks with Nicodemus, works many miracles, Jn. 2 & 3
2. Sychar—about 9 mos. later, talks with woman at well, Jn. 4
3. Cana of Galilee—Heals nobleman's son sick at Capernaum, Jn. 4
4. Nazareth—Preaches in synagogue, first rejection there, Lk. 4
5. Capernaum—2nd call of fishermen, preaching tour, heals man let down through roof, call of Matthew, controversy about eating and fasting, Mt. 4-8-9; Mk. 1-2; Lk. 4-5





THE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

himself to Jesus, though some three years would pass before he openly did so, Jn. 19:39.

Jesus, like 2:24-25 says, knew what was in the man who came to Him, so He answered the unspoken question directly. Heb. 4:12-13 states the fact which we see in our text.

Jesus was seemingly surprised that Nicodemus did not understand a basic principle of the Bible, which is that "like produces like" as stated in Gen. 1. He should have known that things material or physical do not produce things spiritual, or vice versa. If one is to become a part of a spiritual kingdom, then a spiritual birth is necessary. God uses the analogy of a physical birth to help explain the process of becoming a new creation.

The analogy of physical birth to spiritual birth is evident, but the question comes: how much is to be considered as being the same in both realms? The reader should know this fact: an analogy proves nothing, it only illustrates. Jesus states one similarity: a birth is needed to become a part of the flesh, and so it is in the realm of the spirit. Nothing else is stated explicitly. Hence, the religious world has argued for centuries over this passage.

Some declare that the *water* and the *spirit* are like a mother and father. But others insist that the "mother" precedes the "father" (water before spirit) and that order in time is not so in the physical realm. The conception must take place before the water is present. For those who argue that the order of words in a passage necessarily proves order in time, consider Acts 20:21.

Some argue that, as the human child has nothing at all to do with its birth, so it is in the spiritual realm. The Holy Spirit moves (works) as He wills, and only those in whom He works are born again. Some who hold this position hold that the word 'water' in the text means 'spirit'. Thus Jesus says, ". . . spirit, even the spirit."

NEW TESTAMENT HISTORY: THE CHRIST

Considering other passages, we conclude that the following is true: 1) man is created as a moral creature. Implied: the right of choice. 2) the spiritual world known as heaven is entered only by choice. 3) The Holy Spirit, through His sword, the Word of God, presents the option of a new birth to all who hear the word. 4) Those who choose to become a part of the spiritual kingdom are considered as new babes in Christ. Consider the following Scripture for each point: 1) and 2) Gen. 1:26; Deut. 30:15-20; Josh. 24:15; II Chron. 7:14; Matt. 7:24-27; Jn. 14:1-3; Acts 26:16-18, 28; Rom. 10:17; Heb. 3:12—4:3; Rev. 20:11-15; 21:6-8; 22:17. 3) Lk. 8:4-15; Acts 2:37-40; 10:34-35; 11:14; 13:38-39; 15:9; Eph. 6:17; I Tim. 4:16; II Tim. 1:10; James 1:21; 4) Eph. 4:11-14; Col. 3:16; Heb. 5:11-14; I Pet. 1:22—2:2.

Jesus teaches that what Nicodemus heard he should believe, since Jesus is the one who came from heaven, v. 13, and thus has the authority to so speak. God had centuries earlier given a type of Christ in the serpent made by Moses. Even as the people had to do, Num. 21:4-9, for physical life, so does the seeker for spiritual life: he must look (an act of the will) to live. Looking is an act of faith, since we can in no way prove we will receive life until we do. Faith does not become sight until we enter the place called heaven. But there is certainly no other system on earth among men that offers either as much reason for 1) faith or 2) hope as the Christian religion. God has seen to that. It is plain enough that all who run may read, Habakkuk 2:2; Acts 10:34-35; nor was it done in a corner, Acts 26:22-26; I Cor. 15:1-11; and it is a more sure word, Heb. 1:1-3; 2:1-4; II Pet. 1:16-21.

To show that Jesus was to be understood that both God and the would-be disciple are involved in the new birth, the first people who ever became Christians as a

result of hearing the Gospel preached are found in Acts 2. Peter preached God's message, and those who were willing to accept the message were told to repent and be immersed, v. 38. Upon doing so, they became a part of the body of Christ, thus "in Christ" and, as such, new creatures. This well illustrates the way to be born again. If not, why did the Spirit direct Peter and the apostles to do and say what they said and did in Acts 2?

Whether Jesus utters 3:16-21 or not (the red letters will not tell you—the Greek text written by the apostle John did not have red ink for Jesus' words) is not important. What is important is the fact that we have a choice, and our life will definitely tell which choice we have made.

The final section in 3:22-36 brings to our attention a dispute about purifying (it was not the last dispute over how a person is purified in God's eyes by any means). Some supposed a rivalry between John and Jesus, but as John plainly shows, it was all in their minds. His whole life was given over to service as God directed. Would that all who read this be able to utter 3:30 as their own philosophy of life.

Again, whether 3:31-36 is an expression by John the immerser or John the writer (and apostle) is impossible to tell. But the text shows why men should accept Jesus: 1) He is from above, 2) He utters God's words, 3) He has the Holy Spirit without measure, and 4) those who accept Him *now possess* eternal life (see II Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14) and those who do not *now have* God's wrath abiding on them. Therefore, everyone who is alive, at any given moment, is either saved or lost. The difference? In Christ or not in Christ!

The reader should note that 4:2 does not say that Jesus immersed only His disciples, or that only His disciples immersed others. 3:22 seems to teach that both

Jesus and His disciples immersed. 4:2 only says that at the time of our text the disciples of Jesus were immersing people who came to hear and believe the message preached.

This ministry consumed some time, and the rest of the 8-9 month period was spent in "making and immersing more learners" than His forerunner, John. But the ungodliness in the godly got the upper hand, and Jesus became unacceptable to (godly?) leaders in Jerusalem and Judea. He leaves and goes to Galilee where he ministers about 4 months (Jn. 4:35 gives a point of time during this year) preceding the second Passover and through all of the second year of ministry.

We ought not to think, though, that Jesus did not minister anymore to this city, even if the accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke do not record events there until the final week. The texts in Matt. 23:37-39 and Luke 13:34-35 (and implied in Luke 19:41-44) show clearly that Jesus did do so. John's gospel shows some of that ministry.

Noticing the many in the Judean area who were either immersed by Jesus or John, we wonder if the "famous" thief on the cross were not among them. It is often said that he was not immersed, but silence proves nothing. It is just as probable that he had heard Jesus and was immersed. How else would he know about a kingdom Jesus might have? Why did he call Jesus "Lord?" Do not these things show he knew something about Jesus and His ministry?

"They remembered." So John marks the fact that the apostles also recalled what Jesus did at this first Passover (verse 22). Many saw His "signs" and became believers in Him since signs gave clear evidence for the deity in His life. The hearts of many in the city were not changed, however. Like the three cities of Galilee, unbelief marked the city for destruction, Matt. 24, Mk.

13, Lk. 21, which ultimately occurred in the years A.D. 68-70. How few really could catch the spirit of John, whose life was given over to "decreasing" while Jesus "increased." Would that each reader of this historical remark (John 3:30) determine that, whatever others may do, he or she will be like John, rather than the many in that day and time who refused to do God's will (see Lk. 7:29-30; Matt. 21:23-27; Mk. 11:27-33; Lk. 20:1-8).

Sychar in Samaria—John 4:3-42

"Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe." Full heads of wheat hanging down! The unmistakable signal to the experienced eye that it is time to roll the combine out. But the eyes of some disciples with Jesus were unseeing when it came to another type of ripe harvest field among a despised culture. Jesus was not blind though! A sharp command issued to these disciples jarred their eyes to seeing, and revival came to the Samaritans of Sychar. The lesson: God sees only a world lost. Reprimand: We, having eyes to see, see not! How else do we answer for the obvious status of 3 billion people . . . lost? Surely God is not willing that they perish, nor is He unable to save them. The other factor in salvation is the human element: us. Do you know a ripe harvest field when you see one?

"The well is deep, and you have no rope." Perhaps the only place which we can surely say was graced by Jesus' presence, and go to it ourselves, is Jacob's well. Four thousand years of history are bound up in a little spot near the base of Mt. Gerizim, some 31 miles north of Jerusalem, and 5 miles southeast of Samaria. It is probably to be identified with the well known today as Bir Ya'Kub. Of course, like many other things in Palestine, it has been glamorized. But when Jacob purchased the land from the

sons of Hamor for the sum of 100 pieces of money, it doubtless was not much for a tourist attraction. Tradition among the Samaritans had Jacob digging it, v. 12. McGarvey suggested that the presence of the well is somewhat of a mystery, since the area seemingly had a copious supply of water otherwise. He posited the reason for the well was that Jacob dug it to be independent of his neighbors. It was then (1879) about 66 feet deep, filled up with rocks, etc., thrown in by visitors (Lands of the Bible, p. 283-284). Today water from the well may still be had to satisfy the thirsty. Some today identify Sychar with Shechem, though others do not.

Two vivid facts, among others, Jesus called to the attention of the women and, as well, to us. One is that God is not restricted to any one culture or time. He is rather the God of all historical times and places. Such is Paul's implication in Acts 14:14-17 and 17:22-31. Another is like unto the passage in John 3:6. We are spirit beings, living in a fleshly tabernacle (note John 1:14 coupled with 4:24 "deity is spirit"; and then Genesis 1:26). This type of being is sought by God to render adoration to Him, v. 23. Never regard yourself as "just" human. That is truly untrue! Any system of philosophy which teaches that man is just flesh is anti-Biblical. Man is not the measure of all things. The many differing philosophies, unless solidly Biblical, offer no absolute from which to reckon. This leaves man no mooring point, no universal, and he is left with only particulars. Hence philosophy is a bag with holes in it. The Christian reckons all things from an absolute (God) which never changes. The universal provides a pattern for all the particulars. Hence, every aspect of life can be fitted into a unit, Rom. 8:28. We are not left with loose ends. Modern jazz, art, literature, theology—all are full of the philosophy that there is no God. With no absolute, it is then no wonder that

FIRST YEAR MINISTRY

modern man tries drugs or Haight-Ashbury, or suicide. It is scriptural to "not consider ourselves better than we should" Rom. 12:16. Yet it is also plainly taught that we ought to live as we are: created in the image of God, and not think of ourselves as only flesh and bones, Col. 3:1ff.; Mk. 8:34-37, and our text.

The Samaritans needed to learn the lesson that their worship needed correction; their views, attitudes, and practices harmonized with God's will. They had problems but so did others. We have problems, but so do others. God has answers for all. Though despised by the Jews as offspring of intermarriages of Jews with Gentile peoples in prior centuries, yet Jesus was interested in their life, and satisfied Himself with service to them. Interestingly enough, they confessed Him as the Savior of the world, a step not even taken yet in their thinking by His disciples (note John 1:41-49; Acts 1:6).

This interview of the woman and Jesus offers a great study in personal evangelism (taking a person where he is and leading him to greater faith), and the psychology of dealing with others. Note also the progression of the woman in her attitude about Jesus: 1) a Jew (an obnoxious culture), 2) a possible help (thirst-quenching water), 3) a prophet, and 4) possible Messiah. The Greek of v. 29b has the woman saying something like "This man can't really be the Messiah, can he?" She expected a negative answer from the villagers, but she might have only expressed herself thusly (when she actually believed Jesus to be the Messiah) to keep from creating prejudice in the minds of the hearers. Consider the response of those who believed in verse 42: their expression indicated that they had concluded this idea, too.

The life of faith in Christ is an ever-abounding one, even like an artesian well. The woman really received a

lasting drink at the well, not only for herself, but many others as well.

This is a good place to remark about Jesus' humanness again. Consider the following references to Him as starters: He was both tired and thirsty here, compassionate Matt. 9:36, obedient Matt. 17:24, hungry Matt. 21:18, sorrowful and desirous of companionship Matt. 26:37, angry Mk. 3:5, amazed Mk. 6:6, indignant Mk. 10:14, loved Mk. 10:21, astonished Lk. 7:9, grieved Jn. 11:33, wept Jn. 11:35, (would be) joyful Jn. 15:11. He did not play at being man!

GALILEAN MINISTRY (1 YEAR, 3-4 MONTHS)

Cana of Galilee—John 4:43-54

Nicodemus was not the only observer of Jesus' miracles at Jerusalem 8 months earlier. Jesus' Galilean countrymen also did. Yet to condition faith only on such is but to be reprimanded by Jesus, v. 48. We (like the nobleman) need to learn that faith does not limit God (Jesus did not need to "come down" to the place where the son was, some 18 miles northeast at Capernaum); and with Jesus, it is not "it may be true" but rather "it must be true." Invariably Jesus takes us where we are and attempts to lead us where we ought to be. When we follow in obedience, we will find that it is even as He has said. Faith is the key that unlocks the door.

Cana of Galilee is generally identified with modern Kefr Kenna, 4 miles NNE of Nazareth. But some, including modern Arabs, hold for a site 9 miles north of Nazareth called Khirbet Kana. Nathanael made his home here, Jn. 21:2, and of course, Jesus had friends here (see Jn. 2).