

# **The Life of JESUS CHRIST**

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New and Revised Edition

NEW YORK

CHICAGO

TORONTO

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## **Chapter 4**

### **THE YEAR OF OBSCURITY**

Paragraphs 56-65. The First Disciples.

58. The First Miracle.

59. The Cleansing of the Temple.

60. Nicodemus.

61-65. Reasons for the meagerness of the Records of this Year. [48]

56. The records of this year which we possess are extremely meager, comprising only two or three incidents, which may be here enumerated, especially as they form a kind of program of His future work.

57. When He emerged from the wilderness after the forty days of temptation, with His grasp of His future plan tightened by that awful struggle and with the inspiration of His baptism still swelling His heart, He appeared once more on the bank of the Jordan, and John pointed Him out as the great Successor to himself of whom he had often spoken. He especially introduced Him to some of the choicest of his own disciples, who immediately became His followers. Probably the very first of these to whom He spoke was the man who was afterwards to be His favorite disciple and to give to the world the divinest portrait of His character and life. John the Evangelist - for he it was - has left an account of this first meeting and the interview that followed it, which retains in all its freshness the impression which CHRIST's majesty and purity made on his receptive mind. The other young men who attached themselves to Him at the same time were Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathanael. They had been prepared for their new Master by their intercourse with the Baptist, and although they did not at once give up their employments and follow Him in the same way as they did at a later period, they received impressions at their very first meeting which decided their whole after-career. The [49] Baptist's disciples do not seem to have at once gone over in a body to CHRIST. But the best of them did so. Some mischief-makers endeavored to excite envy in his mind by pointing out how his influence was passing away to Another. But they little understood that great man, whose chief greatness was his humility. He

answered them that it was his joy to decrease, while CHRIST increased, for it was CHRIST who as the Bridegroom was to lead home the bride, while he was only the Bridegroom's friend, whose happiness consisted in seeing the crown of festal joy placed on the head of another.

58. With His newly attached followers JESUS departed from the scene of John's ministry and went north to Cana in Galilee, to attend a marriage to which He had been invited. Here He made the first display of the miraculous powers with which He had been recently endowed, by turning water into wine. It was a manifestation of His glory intended specially for his new disciples, who, we are told, thenceforward believed on Him, which means, no doubt, that they were fully convinced that He was the Messiah. It was intended also to strike the key-note of His ministry as altogether different from the Baptist's. John was an ascetic hermit, who fled from the abodes of men and called his hearers out into the wilderness. But JESUS had glad tidings to bring to men's hearths; He was to mingle in their common life, and produce a happy revolution in their circumstances, which would be like the turning of the water of their life into wine.

59. Soon after this miracle He returned again to Judaea to attend the Passover, and gave a still more striking proof of the joyful and enthusiastic mood in which He was then living, by purging the temple of the sellers of animals and the money-changers, who had introduced their traffic into its courts. These persons were allowed to carry on their sacrilegious trade under the pretence of accommodating strangers who came to worship at Jerusalem, by selling [50] them the victims which they could not bring from foreign countries, and supplying, in exchange for foreign money, the Jewish coins in which alone they could pay their temple dues. But what had been begun under the veil of a pious pretext had ended in gross disturbance of the worship, and in elbowing the Gentile proselytes from the place which GOD had allowed them in His house. JESUS had probably often witnessed the disgraceful scene with indignation during His visits to Jerusalem, and now, with the prophetic zeal of His baptism upon Him, He broke out against it. The same look of irresistible purity and majesty which had appalled John, when He sought baptism, prevented any resistance on the part of the ignoble crew, and made the onlookers recognize the lineaments of the prophets of ancient days, before whom kings and crowds alike were wont to quail. It was the beginning of His reformatory work against the religious abuses of the time.

60. He wrought other miracles during the feast, which must have excited much talk among the pilgrims from every land who crowded the city. One result of them was to bring to His lodging one night the venerable and anxious inquirer to whom He delivered the marvellous discourse on the nature of the new kingdom He had come to found, and the grounds of admission to it, which has been preserved to us in the third chapter of John. It seemed a hopeful sign that one of the heads of the nation should approach Him in a spirit so humble; but Nicodemus was the only one of them on whose mind the first display of the :Messiah's power in the capital produced a deep and favorable impression.

61. Thus far we follow clearly the first steps of JESUS. But at this point our information in regard to the first year of His ministry, after commencing with such fulness, Comes to a sudden stop, and for the next eight months :we learn nothing more about Him but that He was baptizing [51] in Judaea - **"though Jesus Himself baptized not, but His disciples"** - and that He **"made and baptized more disciples than John."**

62. What can be the meaning of such a blank? It is to be noted, too, that it is only in the Fourth Gospel that we receive even the details given above. The Synoptists omit the first year of the ministry altogether, beginning their narrative with the ministry in Galilee, and merely indicating in the most cursory manner that there was an antecedent ministry in Judaea.

63. It is very difficult to explain all this. The most natural explanation would perhaps be, that the incidents of this year were imperfectly known at the time when the Gospels were composed. It would be quite natural that the details of the period when JESUS had not attracted much public attention should be much less accurately remembered than those of the period when He was by far the best known personage in the country. But, indeed, the Synoptists all through take little notice of what happened in Judaea, till the close of His life draws nigh. It is to John we are indebted for the connected narrative of His various visits to the south.

64. But John, at least, could scarcely have been ignorant of the incidents of eight months. We shall perhaps be conducted to the explanation by attending to the little-noticed fact, which John communicates, that for a time JESUS took up the work of the Baptist. He baptized by the hands of His disciples, and drew even larger crowds than John. Must not this mean that He was convinced, by the small impression which His manifestation of Himself at the Passover had made, that the nation was utterly unprepared for receiving Him yet as the Messiah, and that what was needed was the extension of the preparatory work of repentance and baptism, and accordingly, keeping in the background His higher character, became for the time the colleague of John? This view is confirmed by the [52] fact, that it was upon John's imprisonment at this year's end that he opened fully His Messianic career in Galilee.

65. A still deeper explanation of the silence of the Synoptists over this period, and their scant notice of CHRIST's subsequent visits to Jerusalem, has been suggested. JESUS came primarily to the Jewish nation, whose authoritative representatives were to be found at Jerusalem. He was the Messiah promised to their fathers, the Fulfiller of the nation's history. He had indeed a far wider mission to the whole world, but He was to begin with the Jews, and at Jerusalem. The nation, however, in its heads at Jerusalem, rejected Him, and, so He was compelled to found His world-wide community from a different center. This having become evident by the time the Gospels were written, the Synoptists passed His activity at the headquarters of the nation, as a work with merely negative results, in great measure by, and concentrated attention on the period of His ministry when He was gathering the company of believing souls that was to form the nucleus of the Christian Church. However this may be, certainly at the close of the first year of the ministry of JESUS there fell already over Judea and Jerusalem the shadow of an awful coming event - the shadow of that most frightful of all national crimes which the world has ever witnessed, the rejection and crucifixion by the Jews of their Messiah. [53]

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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