

# Jesus



## The Kingdom of God

How does Jesus begin his public ministry, according to Mark?

## Election & Eschatology

What is the first central idea Jesus believed and acted upon?

How would Genesis 3:15 have been interpreted by those who lived before Jesus?

What was the calling of Israel?

What is the core promise of the Old Testament?

How did God intend to fulfill that promise?

What is the second central idea Jesus believed and acted upon?

When the “great and glorious day of the Lord” appeared, what did many 1st-century Jews expect to happen?

What are the technical terms for these two central ideas?

## **Israel**

What was the worst thing about living under foreign occupation for the Jews?

What was the natural question that many Jews asked as a result of the foreign occupation? What was the conclusion?

How did 1st-century Jews associate politics and religion?

What does “the kingdom of God” mean?

In what four ways did 1st-century Jews pursue the kingdom of God?

How did Jesus pursue the kingdom of God?

## **God’s Plan Revealed**

How did Jesus believe God was unfolding his plan of salvation?

How did Jesus act to bring about the kingdom of God?

What are the three essential points of Jesus' early prophetic message?

## **The End of Exile**

What was the point Jesus was making in the parable of the prodigal son?

## **The Call of the Renewed People**

How did the stories Jesus told function?

What does the phrase "repent and believe" mean?

How did Jesus offer God's radical acceptance and forgiveness?

According to the sermon on the mount, what is the true calling of Israel?

What is the significance of Jesus choosing twelve disciples?

## **Disaster & Vindication**

What was the radical twist Jesus gave to the retelling of the story of Israel?

According to Jesus, who would be vindicated on the great and glorious day of the Lord?

## **Two Thoughts to Move Us Forward**

What are we to do and be as Christians?

How does the foundation Jesus laid serve as the model for the whole building?

## The Messiah's Prophecy | Isaiah 61

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,  
because the LORD has anointed me  
to preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners,  
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor  
and the day of vengeance of our God,  
to comfort all who mourn,  
and provide for those who grieve in Zion—  
to bestow on them a crown of beauty  
instead of ashes,  
the oil of gladness  
instead of mourning,  
and a garment of praise  
instead of a spirit of despair.  
They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
a planting of the LORD  
for the display of his splendor.  
They will rebuild the ancient ruins  
and restore the places long devastated;  
they will renew the ruined cities  
that have been devastated for generations.  
Aliens will shepherd your flocks;  
foreigners will work your fields and vineyards.  
And you will be called priests of the LORD,  
you will be named ministers of our God.

You will feed on the wealth of nations,

and in their riches you will boast.

Instead of their shame  
my people will receive a double portion,  
and instead of disgrace  
they will rejoice in their inheritance;  
and so they will inherit a double portion in their land,  
and everlasting joy will be theirs.

"For I, the LORD, love justice;

I hate robbery and iniquity.

In my faithfulness I will reward them

and make an everlasting covenant with them.

Their descendants will be known among the nations

and their offspring among the peoples.

All who see them will acknowledge

that they are a people the LORD has blessed."

I delight greatly in the LORD;

my soul rejoices in my God.

For he has clothed me with garments of salvation

and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness,

as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,

and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

For as the soil makes the sprout come up

and a garden causes seeds to grow,

so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and

praise

spring up before all nations.

## The Parable of the Prodigal Son | Luke 15:11-32

Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'" But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'" The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'" "My son," the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

## The Sermon on the Mount | Matthew 5

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

## **Suggested Resources**

**The Challenge of Jesus** | N. T. Wright

**The New Testament and the People of God** | N. T. Wright

**Jesus and the Victory of God** | N. T. Wright

**Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament** | Christopher J. H. Wright

**The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth** | Ben Witherington III

**The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions** | Marcus J. Borg, N. T. Wright

**In the Steps of Jesus: An Illustrated Guide to the Places of the Holy Land** | Peter Walker

**Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony** | Richard Bauckham

**Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ** | Martin Hengel

**Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels** | InterVarsity Press

## Further Reading | Who Were the Pharisees? • Andy Holt

We often think of the Pharisees as ultra-religious, legalistic hypocrites who were trying to earn their way to heaven through their good works. They were the enemies of Jesus primarily because they didn't believe in faith and grace. They were trying to earn salvation while Jesus was trying to give it away freely to those who would put their trust in him.

While there are certainly hints of the truth here, we have gotten far off the mark if we make the Pharisees out to be some proto-medieval Catholic sect. The Reformers found in the Pharisees a convenient analogue to the works-righteousness, indulgence-oriented religion of their day, and our understanding of this important group has been tainted ever since. Let's take a closer look at these Pharisees, because, in some small part, we cannot fully understand Jesus without understanding those whom he most ardently opposed.

### Faithful to Torah

The Pharisees were an influential political and religious party that called for faithful observance of Torah. "The Pharisees saw themselves as standing firm for the old ways, the traditions of Israel, against paganism from without and assimilation from within." The pagan Romans ruled the world while the Pharisees lived and taught in Israel, and there was always conflict brewing between the people of God and their pagan overlords. The Pharisees sought to keep themselves, and all Israel, distinct from the Romans, which is why they called Israel to faithfully observe Torah.

The aims of the Pharisees "were the honor of Israel's god, the following of his covenant charter, and the pursuit of the full promised redemption of Israel." A far cry from works-righteousness and futile efforts to earn their way to heaven, isn't it? In fact, their aims are quite in line with the aims of Jesus. So, why then, were Jesus and the Pharisees so antagonistic toward one another? The answer lies not in the difference of aims, but in the difference of directions. The most dangerous direction isn't always backwards—sometimes the most dangerous direction you walk is ever so slightly off the path.

### Areas of Conflict with Jesus

The first way in which Jesus and the Pharisees clashed was in their associations. What does it mean to be separate from the world? The Pharisees saw sinners as people to be avoided, but Jesus came to minister to the likes of tax-collectors, prostitutes, and other "untouchables." "Jesus took a different model [from the Pharisees] for the religious life—involvement with sinners while not partaking in their sins." Being primarily concerned with their own purity, the Pharisees would have never eaten in the home of, for example, Zaccheus the tax collector.

Ritual purity was, as we have noted, extremely important for the Pharisees. "Faced with social, political, and cultural 'pollution' at the level of national life as a whole, one natural reaction...was to concentrate on personal cleanness, to cleanse and purify an area over which one did have control as a compensation for the impossibility of cleansing or purifying an area—the outward and visible political one—over which one had none." Sensing the pagan infestation of their nation, the Pharisees avoided interaction with sinners of any kind so as to maintain what semblance of ritual purity they could. Jesus, however, declared that it's not what goes into a man that makes him unclean, but what comes out of his mouth. In other words, purity comes not from your environment, but rather from your heart.

Jesus and the Pharisees also differed over what it meant to keep the Sabbath. The Pharisees were adamant about Sabbath-keeping because it was a symbol of national identity—an identity that was in crisis given the presence of their pagan overlords. They became particularly upset with Jesus when he "violated" the Sabbath by healing on it. Jesus, however, held that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. That is to say, the Sabbath was designed to serve humanity, and not to be a source for national identity.

### Why They Wanted to Kill Jesus

As you can see, the Pharisees and Jesus had their differences, but they were differences by degrees. Jesus had more in common with the Pharisees than with any other religious group of his time. So why did they want to kill him?

First of all, Jesus had power. His miracles demonstrated tremendous power over evil spirits, disease, nature, and even death itself. Such power could only come from God—which is precisely the conclusion that the majority of people came to.

Secondly, he taught as though he had authority in himself. He did not appeal to the traditions of the elders, or even to Moses (at

least not very often). Instead, he relied on his own understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures. He acted as though he didn't need anyone else to validate his teaching.

What ultimately got Jesus into trouble was the incongruence of his teaching with the traditions of the Pharisees and the contemporary interpretations of Torah. He was therefore labeled a deceiver, and the power he demonstrated over evil spirits, disease, nature and death made him dangerous. He was leading people astray, and his heretical message was being validated by his miracles. No one could be more dangerous than Jesus. For the sake of the nation, he must die.

## Conclusion

The Pharisees had no idea what works-righteousness was, and they would have given us strange looks if we accused them of trying to earn their way to heaven. They were, rather, the most faithful of Jews. They loved God and pursued his calling with an intensity and faithfulness that is extremely admirable. They were, however, mistaken by degrees, and when God finally showed up, they killed him.

This has been an all-too-brief exploration of the Pharisees of second-temple Israel. There is so much more to discover, and for further study please read the two books I have quoted from here: "The New Testament and the People of God" by N.T. Wright, and "Backgrounds of Early Christianity" by Everett Ferguson.

