

YESHUA DISCUSSION GUIDE

PROGRAM 1: "The Land And The Promise" Part One

INTRODUCTION

The story of Jesus does not begin with His birth. Biblically speaking it begins "before the foundation of the world" in the mind and heart of God (Eph. 1:3-4). Historically it finds its beginning in the history of God's chosen people, Israel. The first two films in this series document the geographical, cultural, and political background in Old Testament narratives and thus prepare for the story of Jesus.

This first film introduces the Holy Land by showing the viewer Jericho, that most ancient of cities, and then sweeping across the desert with Amorite hoards to Ur of the Chaldees. The surprise is how advanced a civilization this ancient city-state had developed by the time of Abraham. Its destruction and the fall of its gods serves as the background for Abraham's response to the living God's call.

Then condensing centuries, the film ushers the viewer into the magnificent land of Egypt where Rameses II accomplished astounding building feats using the Israelites as slaves until God raised up Moses as a deliverer for His people.

The "land of promise" was not discovered accidentally by wandering Hebrews but was a gift, part of the covenant-promise God made to Abraham. It indicated that God was at work in a specific place and in the history of a specific nation, unfolding His kingdom until it would be fulfilled in Jesus, the Messiah. The God of the Bible entered into the lives of people and changed them. Abraham and Moses are cases in point.

THE PERSONAL GOD

1. Does it seem strange that Terah and his family "served other gods" back in Ur (Joshua 24:2) and yet are the ancestors of God's chosen people? What gods do we sometimes inadvertently serve, and how do they fail us?
2. The fall of Ur and the ineffectiveness of the moon god, Nanna, must have been a shattering, catastrophic event in Abraham's life. Suddenly all the props had been pulled out from under him. In a similar way, Moses, the adopted son of a princess of Egypt, was a fugitive from justice. His life, too, must have seemed a shambles when God called him. How did God use crises situations to accomplish His purposes in the lives of Abraham and Moses (Rom. 8:28)? Ask group members to think of some shattering experience in their own lives when props were pulled out from under them: the loss of a job, the death of a loved one, the breakup of a relationship. Did these crisis situations make them feel more open to God's call to serve Him or did they make them feel that God was irrelevant to what was happening? Ask them to explain their response.
3. The covenant-call in Gen. 12:1-3 resulted in the action reported in verse 4. At this point the text says nothing about Abraham's faith; it just records what he did. How does Abraham's action help you understand James 2:18; 1 Sam. 15:22; Matt. 7:21; and Luke 10:36-37?

4. Egypt was an impressive civilization and a mighty power. The Bible vividly pictures the audacity of Moses confronting this super power on behalf of God. List other people of faith in Scripture who were as audacious as Moses (Matt. 10:18-20; Acts 4:13). Name some people in our own time who were bold in responding to God's call.
5. God described himself to Moses and the Israelites in personal terms (Ex. 3:13-15 and 6:2-3). What significance for us is there in those names of God?

THE PROMISE AND THE DELIVERANCE

1. God revealed Himself as the living God of Israel by an act of deliverance. That act of salvation was remembered by all Israel, including Jesus, in the celebration of the Passover (Matt. 26:17-19). The film gives an awesome picture of the power and glory of Rameses the Great. If you lived as a second or third generation Hebrew slave at that time, what would have been your attitude toward Egypt? What might have been your attitude toward God?
2. Compare what might have been the attitudes of God's people in Egypt with the experience Paul described in Rom. 8:18-25 and with the bitterness of Jeremiah in Jer. 20:14-18. When we experience similar feelings, what acts of God are most reassuring and inspire hope in us?
3. According to Ex. 5:1-9, what was Rameses the Great's concept of Moses' God? How is Rameses' attitude reflected in contemporary attitudes toward the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ?
4. What stands out for you as the most significant element in the story of the exodus from Egypt? Why is that element so important to you? Why did this event become so important for the way the chosen people talked about God (Ps. 77:11-20 and 74:12-13; Is. 51:10)? What saving events are reflected in the language the church uses in its worship today to describe God?
5. It was important for Jesus as a devout Jew to keep the Passover with His disciples (Matt. 26:17ff). Does the Lord's Supper instituted by Jesus at Passover (Matt. 26:26-28) have a similar function for Christians? Why or why not?

THE LAND

1. The territory called Palestine at the time of Jesus was part of the initial covenant given to Abraham. It was reconfirmed again and again throughout the Old Testament as God's gift to the people of Israel. It was tangible evidence of God's fulfillment of His gracious promise to Abraham. It also was the place where God's purpose for the world was unfolded. Possession of the land was linked with loyalty to the covenant on Israel's part (Deut.8:6-20). Although it was parceled out to the clans of Israel by lots, it still belonged to God (Lev.25:23). Why is it so important for us to own our own piece of land? What danger might there be in putting so much importance on ownership of property? What comfort is there in ownership of land?

2. Why was the land of Palestine so important to Israel in the Old Testament? What did it say to them about God and God's promise to Abraham? Why do you suppose God included something so specific as a particular region of the Middle East in His promise (Gen 12:1)?
3. The promised land ultimately belonged to God. Israel was to be a steward of it. If we regard the land in which we live as God's property, how would our attitude toward it differ from the attitude of someone who views it from a purely ecological point of view, that is, as something finite and fragile to be protected? How would a view of land as God's property differ from the way a developer would look at it?
4. The writer to the Hebrew Christians connects the promised land with heaven (Heb. 11:13-16). It also serves as a symbol of the new Jerusalem in Rev. 21:1 -2. How do those passages help us develop the right perspective on property and possessions?
5. Do you think the promised land is as important to Jews today as it was to Jews in Jesus' day? Why or why not? Do you think God's promise in Gen. 17:8 still applies? Why or why not?

LOOKING AHEAD

Read Ps. 105, Joshua 1-6 and 24, and Ps. 2.

PROGRAM 1: "The Land And The Promise" Part Two

INTRODUCTION

"The Land the The Promise" Part Two begins with the Israelites taking possession of the land promised to Abraham, their conquest of Jericho and their deportation, and exile to Babylon centuries later. A remnant of the nation returned to the promised land only to become subject to the Greeks and, finally, the Romans who made Israel a puppet state and put on the throne a half-Jew named Herod.

Herod was a master builder and politician who eventually secured for Israel all the land that had been given to it in the beginning. To that land and ruler in the first century came astrologers from the east asking, "Where is the one born king of the Jews?"

The promise given to Abraham in the covenant (Gen. 19:1-5) was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. All the history in between led to that fulfillment and demonstrated God's faithfulness. Kingdoms rose and fell but the kingdom of God endured and His purposes were achieved.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE KINGDOM OF MAN

1. Every civilization and empire in the ancient Mediterranean world became, consciously or unconsciously, a participant in God's redeeming activity on behalf of His chosen people (Is. 45:1-4). It is only with the eyes of faith that we are able to distinguish the kingdom of man from the kingdom of God. The two realms are not identical nor is the former necessary to usher in the latter. God's kingdom comes where Jesus is revered as Lord and Savior. In Him God accomplished His eternal purpose of saving the world.

In explaining the Lord's Prayer, Martin Luther said, "The kingdom of God comes indeed without our prayer, of itself; but we pray in this petition that it may come unto us, also." Luther meant that God was in charge whether we perceive Him to be or not. Describe some actions or events in our world which you feel might show the control of God. Some people have identified the church with the kingdom of God since there He clearly makes Himself and His power known. What danger is there in making the church identical with God's kingdom?

2. Why did Herod consider the Child Yeshua a threat? Why did His birth disturb not only Herod but also the whole city of Jerusalem (Matt. 2:3)? How is Jesus still a threat to people in the power positions of our world?

3. Ask the group to read Dan. 2:31-45 which tells the story of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and Daniel's interpretation. How does Daniel's explanation apply to the kingdoms referred to in the film? How does the Gospel help us understand that God is truly in charge in history (Dan. 2:44)? What sometimes holds Christians back from trusting that the Gospel is truly the "power of God" in our world (Rom. 1:16)?

4. The Old Testament prophets claimed that despite the trappings of power, the glory of the kings of this world will end. The prophet Jeremiah said, "Even the stork in the heavens knows her times" (Jer. 8:7). What are some ways by which people today try to make their power and glory permanent? What might be some indications that we as Christians sometimes place too much trust in the power of nations instead of the power of God in His kingdom?

5. God's movements in the world often seem powerless. The baby Moses was found helpless among reeds; the Baby Jesus was laid in a manger. What do these two stories say about God's purposes and His way of getting things done (Col. 2:15). What do these two stories say about the Gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 13:31-32)? What do they say about the instruments God chooses to accomplish His purposes (1 Cor. 1:26-31)? What do they say about us (Matt. 18:1-5)?

THE EXILE AND RETURN

1. The return of a remnant of Israel to the promised land after the Babylonian captivity reaffirmed God's faithfulness to the covenant promise He made to Abraham. In later years the religious life of God's people centered on Herod's temple in Jerusalem on worship, and on preservation of the purity of religion. Imagine that the year is 550 B.C. and you are Hebrew parents, exiled Jews in Babylon, many miles from their homeland. Psalm 137 may describe your feelings. How would your thoughts and feelings about God, the future, faith, and hope have differed from the thoughts and feelings of the Israelites in Egypt before Moses came to deliver them? How would the thoughts and feelings of Israelites during the two captivities have been the same?

2. Today many people have been exiled from their homeland because of their political or religious beliefs and practices. Ask the group to list individuals or groups they feel are contemporary exiles. What is the biggest adjustment an exile must make? How should the church respond to such refugees?
3. Many people experience exile and return in personal relationships. People leave the church, often during their teen-age years, but then come back 20 years later. Parents exile their children, and children exile their parents. What other kinds of exile experiences do people today go through? What is necessary to end such exiles?
4. What does the return of the remnant by the edict of Cyrus, King of Persia, say about God's faithfulness to the covenant-promise given to Abraham (2 Tim. 2:13)? What relevance does it have for our trust in God?
5. The prophets told Judah that repudiation of God has consequences, grim historical consequences, even for the covenant people. The exile was such a consequence, the judgment of God upon His people's idolatry. But divine punishment has a purpose: to win back people to God. How is God's purpose in discipline sometimes misunderstood by those He punishes? What other method besides punishment does God use to change people's behavior or motivate them? Which approach do you think is the more effective? Why?

THE TEMPLE

1. In Moses' day the Tabernacle was the place where God met His people through His servants. The plan for the tabernacle later became the basic plan for the Temple of Solomon and later on for the Temple of Herod. The Temple was more than a place of prayer and of sacrifice. It became the symbol for Israel of what they were called to be: "a kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:6). An understanding of the design and function of the Temple can help clarify some events in Jesus' life. For example, Matthew's report that the "curtain of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" at Jesus' death (Matt. 27:51) is understood as an indication that Jesus is the Way to the very presence of God. The Messiah would be the One "who shall build the Temple of the Lord" (according to Zech. 6:12), and Jesus was declared to be even "greater than the Temple" (Matt. 12:6) since by His resurrection He replaced it and became Himself the place where God and man came together. The significance of the Temple was fulfilled in and transcended by Jesus Christ (John 4:21-23). Why was the Temple so important to the faith and life of the Old Testament believer? What motivates Christians today to build beautiful churches? Are our motives the same as or different from the motives of the Israelites who built the Temple after the exile (Ezra 3)?
2. Jesus loved the Temple. It was His Father's house, (Luke 2:49); it was a house of prayer, and Jesus did everything to preserve it as such (Luke 19:45-46); it was a place where Jesus taught (Luke 21:37-38); and when He had to prophesy the destruction of the Temple, He did so with grief and tears (Luke 19:41-55, Matt. 24:1-2). How do you explain Jesus' love for the Temple if he came to transcend it and replace it?

3. A house of God brings out the worst and the best in people. The process of building a church often brings to the surface profound feelings and thoughts concerning religion, the church, and fellow Christians. What does the Temple and its construction process say about Herod? What do European cathedrals say about the people of the Middle Ages? What does our house of worship say about those who built it?

4. The Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., by the Roman General Titus, as Jesus had prophesied (Matt. 24:1-2). Jesus also had said, "Someone greater than the Temple is here" (Matt. 12:6). The New Testament asserts that the Temple was replaced by Jesus Himself (John 2:13-22). With these texts in mind, comment on the following:

- (a) I no longer have to offer sacrifices to God for the forgiveness of sin. (Heb. 9:23-28 and 10:11-14).
- (b) I no longer need a temple priest to offer up prayers on my behalf. (Rom. 5:1-2 and Heb. 4:14-16).
- (c) God no longer is limited to a place but may be worshiped anywhere at anytime by anyone. (John 4:21-24).
- (d) God does not confine His dwelling to a building but chooses to dwell in me. (1 Cor. 6:19-20).
- (e) With no Temple and no priestly caste to do God's work and to symbolize God's presence in the world, I am required to do His work and to reflect His presence. (1 Peter 2:9-10; Matt. 5:14-16).

SECURITY

1. Masada was an impregnable fortress. Herod the Great, an extremely cautious man, went to great lengths to fortify and equip this isolated citadel. It was the ultimate symbol of security. Yet Herod the Great died in Jerusalem in 4 B.C. and Masada fell to the Roman commander Flavius Silva in 74 A.D. after a three year siege. Security was neither absolute nor permanent for Herod. What compels men like Herod the Great to build and fortify such citadels as Masada? What fears do people in power have that ordinary people do not have? How does the thinking that motivated Herod to build Masada manifest itself today?

2. Security is important for us today. We want to feel safe and comfortable. What do we fear? What things make us secure?

3. Security apart from God is really no security at all. How does our faith in Christ make us secure in the present as well as the future?

4. Jesus' words in Luke 12:32 (note the context) may give us the secret to security. How do you understand what Jesus said? How do you think the disciples understood Jesus' words?

5. What words of God have been helpful in making you feel secure?

LOOKING AHEAD

Read Luke 1:25-26 and 2:1-20.

PROGRAM 2: "The Promise Takes Root"

Part One

INTRODUCTION

This film deals with events immediately surrounding the birth of Christ. It begins with the angel's visit to Mary in Nazareth at a location now marked by the magnificent Church of the Annunciation, built near the spring where young Mary once drew water.

When Caesar Augustus issued his decree "that all the world should be taxed," (Luke 20:1) Mary and Joseph were forced to travel to Bethlehem where another ornate shrine now marks the traditional location of Jesus' birth, a simple event celebrated ever since in sacred song and art.

The film concludes with a discussion of the possible nature of the star of Bethlehem and the Jewish rites of circumcision and presentation which were observed in the earliest days of our Lord's life on earth.

Our annual celebrations of Christmas have made the events of our Lord's birth familiar to everyone, even people outside the church. It is Important, however, to see "the way it really was" and to reassess our understanding of the Christmas story and our ways of celebrating it in the light of that reality. The central Message of Christmas is that in the coming of Jesus Christ God kept His promises. Jesus was born for all of us. The various ways in which people remember and celebrate His birth indicate how far-reaching that event truly was in its significance.

NAZARETH AND BETHLEHEM: SITES AND SIGHTS

1. Ask the group members to recall from the film as many different ways of depicting the Annunciation and the Nativity as they can. (Group members probably will recall the African and Japanese presentations and perhaps also the Byzantine examples. They may not remember to mention the traditional manger scene from our own culture shown during the singing of the choir's Christmas anthem.) What elements of the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38) and the Christmas story (Luke 2:1 -20) reflect Jewish culture and which elements reflect human nature rather than one particular culture?
2. Since most of the works of art in the film probably do not depict things "the way they really were," what do you think the various artists were trying to convey? What message did they convey to you? If you were an artist, how would you convey the messages of the Annunciation and the Nativity to a deaf child? a blind person? a wealthy person? a prisoner?
3. The singing of the Christmas anthem took place in a modern church with a robed choir and carved nativity figures. What cultures were represented in the scene, and which elements in it seem to you to be universal?
4. Have the group members comment on the very extensive use of gold and silver, precious stones, elaborate architecture, candles and ornate decorations which characterize shrines in Nazareth and Bethlehem today. Why do you think people over the years have made these basically simple locations so fancy? If you had your way, how would you decorate them?

SONGS OF THE SAINTS

1. A significant portion of the film was taken up by the singing of a Christmas anthem especially written for the “Yeshua” series. There is good precedent for translating the story into music since four canticles or “little songs” associated with it have become part of the order of worship in some Christian churches: Mary’s Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) Zechariah’s Benedictus (Luke 1:68-79); the angels’ Gloria in Excelsis (Luke 2:14) and Simeon’s Nunc Dimittis (Luke 2:29-32). Ask the group members to read one or more of these songs and describe what there is in the words that say something specifically about Christmas.
2. What do they say about God’s activity that is relevant to other times of the year and to all the history and experience of His people? How do they describe the results of the Lord’s activity in the lives and attitudes of His people?
3. What do they say about God’s purpose in sending the Savior?
4. At what other times and in what other contexts do Christians regularly use these Christmas songs? Group members might want to look at the liturgies and orders of service used in their worship as well as the language commonly used in their prayers.
5. What do the events of the Christmas story reveal about God’s plan of salvation?

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

1. Even in our scientific age when we seem able to explain almost every event, we need to continue listening to God’s Word and believing God’s promises offered in Jesus Christ. Ask the group members to recall the three theories regarding the possible nature of the star which Dr. Maier explained in the film (comet, nova or exploding star, triple conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn.) Are there any other theories about the nature of the star of which group members are aware? Since none can be proved to be the right one, which one do you prefer? Why?
2. Although today we regard astrology as superstition, in the ancient world it was considered a science. The wise men’s use of it led them to Bethlehem. What information about God is available to the world through the sciences today? Why, in our scientific age, do people still seem fascinated by astrology and base some of their behavior on superstition?
3. The film pointed out that the written Word of God helped the wise men understand the significance of the star. Numbers 24:17 was cited as a reference the wise men might have been shown by Jewish rabbis in Persia. In Jerusalem, the teachers of the Law quoted Micah 5:2 to pinpoint Christ’s birthplace for Herod (Matt. 2:5-6). How does the reliability of Scripture compare to the reliability of other sources of information about God? What do the Scriptures teach us about ourselves? How does that compare with what astrology says about us and our destiny?

4. Ask the group to read the account of the wise men in its context (Mat t. 1:18-2:23) and discuss Matthew’s repeated stress on the fulfillment of God’s Word. (See Matt. 1:22-23,2:4-6,2:14,2:17, and 2:23.) Why do you think Matthew emphasized the fulfillment of prophecy in the story of the wise men?

rites and roots

1. The film ended by describing the Jewish rites of circumcision, presentation, and purification in which the holy family participated shortly after our Lord’s birth. These ceremonies represent the culture into which Jesus was born. Some elements of those rites have their counterparts in our own culture and the modern-day practices of Christianity. Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day (Luke 2:21). Ask the group to read Gen.17:9- 14 for the historic background of this rite. Why do you feel it was important for God to have His chosen people mark themselves physically? Ask the group members to read Col. 2:11-14; Rom. 2:25-29, 6:3-11; and Phil. 3:3. What do these verses say about God’s people being marked? Do they say the same thing as the verses that command circumcision? How do they say the same thing and how do they say something different?

2. The rite of presentation took place in the temple 40 days after a child’s birth (Luke 2:22-29). Ask the group to read Ex. 13:2, 11-16 for the historic background of this rite. What do you suppose it meant to say someone “belongs to the Lord” or is “dedicated to the Lord”? How do we remind ourselves today that we have been redeemed through the sacrifice of a Substitute? Redeemed for what?

3. Along with presenting her Child on the fortieth day, Mary participated in the rite of purification (Luke 2:22). (Read Lev. 12:2-8 for the directives concerning this rite.) The “sin offering” had to do with matters of ritual uncleanness. What message do you think God was trying to convey to His people through His insistence on purity?

4. What rites, ceremonies, and practices in the church do you find particularly meaningful? Why?

Looking Ahead

Read Matt. 2:13-23 and Luke 2:40-52.

PROGRAM 2: "The Promise Takes Root"

Part Two

INTRODUCTION

This film provides background on the childhood and youth of Jesus.

The murderous intentions of King Herod force the holy family to flee to Egypt, perhaps to Alexandria, a teeming center of Greek culture, Roman influence, and Jewish emigration. Following the death and elaborate burial of Herod, the family returns to Nazareth where Jesus grows up in the home and under the religious influence of the carpenter Joseph.

Since the Bible tells us very little about the childhood and youth of Jesus, the film offers background information on the culture of that time on the basis of which we can make assumptions about Jesus' early years. This background involves the political realities of the distant rule of Rome and the rule of murderous Herod close to home.

The film also describes the foreign environment in which Jesus might have lived and the village life of Nazareth where we know He lived as a child in a carpenter's home. The religious influence of the local synagogue certainly figured prominently in Jesus' development.

THE WORD OF GOD

1. Ask the group members to recall as many things from the film as they can that speak of reverence for the written Word of God. The list might include the great synagogue at Alexandria and the beautiful Temple in Jerusalem and the ways the Word of God was proclaimed and handled in those buildings, as well as the teaching and prayer practices of local synagogue schools; standing to read the Word of God in public; and the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into the international Greek. Then ask the group members to make a second list of places and practices that reflect reverence for God's Word in our churches, homes, schools, and communities. What similarities are there between the two lists? What are the differences between the lists?

2. What psychological value is there in going through the same religious rituals each day or week? What value is there in creating new, contemporary religious rituals? What Christian rituals or practices first were created in our culture and in this century? What religious rituals have died out that you feel should be revived?

3. "Actions speak louder than words," the proverb states. And yet, words are obviously important, too. How are God's actions connected to His words? What is the difference between religious education and religious training? How was each illustrated in the film? What is the value, and what might be some dangers, in each?

THE TEACHING CARPENTER

1. This discussion could lead to a greater appreciation of Jesus' true humanity by focusing on the fact that He worked most of His life as a craftsman; that, as one Christian laborer observed gratefully, "He had dirt under His fingernails." If the film's assumption is correct that the occupation of carpentry in which Joseph and Jesus engaged dealt largely with the manufacturer and repair of farm implements, ask the group to list as many of Jesus' parables as they can that deal with agricultural topics. Such a list might include: Sower, Seed, and Soil, Mark 4:1-9; Seed Growing Secretly, Mark 4:26-29; Laborers in the Vineyard, Matt. 20:1-16; Tares among the Wheat, Matt. 13:24-30; Mustard Seed, Mark 4:30-32; Wicked Husbandmen, Matt. 21:33-46; Rich Fool, Luke 12:16-21; Lost Sheep, Luke 15:3-7. What other sayings of Jesus besides the parables refer to work, labor, or agriculture? What attitude toward agriculture and work in general do those parables and sayings convey? Where in our worship life do we mention or emphasize work? Should we give it greater emphasis? Why or why not?
2. What comfort and encouragement do you derive from the fact that Jesus was a working man, thoroughly acquainted with the joys and hardships of daily labor? How might such an image of Jesus make some people uncomfortable?
3. What can we do in our homes and congregation to recognize and celebrate the various kinds of work in which we are engaged?
4. The title "Messiah" (in Hebrew) or "Christ" (in Greek) denotes one who has been anointed or set apart to perform a specific task. With that in mind, invite the group to put together a job description for Jesus' work as the Messiah. You might want to word it in the form of an oath of office like those spoken by government officials when they are inaugurated. In fact, the idea of being inaugurated or installed is probably a good counterpart to the ancient concept of being anointed Hebrews 10:5-10 almost sounds like such an oath of office or job description. As an alternative activity, the group might want to prepare a resume' that would reflect Jesus' qualifications for a position as Messiah.
5. Could you write a similar job description or resume for yourself as a Christian?

HEROD AND CAESAR

1. In the film, both Herod and Caesar were depicted as men who were determined to make a name for themselves and to have their own way. What do you suppose Herod was trying to accomplish by his brutal methods of governing? Ask the group to recall modern political leaders whose actions seem as ruthless as Herod's. Were their goals the same as Herod's? Can brutal practices ever be justified as achieving an ultimately good goal for the people being governed?
2. Ask the group members to think of people who achieved fame and greatness by peaceful and humanitarian methods. How were their goals different from the goals of brutal leaders? How many of the people in this list were religiously motivated? How do John 13:12-17 and Matt. 20:25-28 apply to ways of governing and achieving greatness?

3. Try to find evidence in the film, in history, and in the personal experience of the group members that demonstrates how God accomplishes His will in spite of and, sometimes, even through the evil actions of wicked people.
4. Ask the group members to describe people in their lives who made the deepest impressions on them. What did those people do to become so significant? Were they powerful people? In what sense were they powerful, and in what sense were they not powerful?

LOOKING AHEAD

Read Luke 1:5-25, 1:57-80, and 3:1-22.

PROGRAM 3: "The Voice And The Light" Part One

INTRODUCTION

We know him as John the Baptist (or Baptizer). His was "the voice crying in the wilderness," announcing the coming of the Messiah. John remains somewhat a mystery. We know from Luke that his father was a temple priest and that John grew up in the desert. Tradition tells us he was orphaned at an early age. This segment of the film shows us the desert landscape and caves near the ruins of Qumran, where John may have been raised in a religious community. From here John may have gone to the river Jordan to baptize Jesus and to herald Him as the Messiah.

This episode also tells the fascinating story of the 1947 discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, most ancient of all Biblical manuscripts. Almost 2,000 years earlier; following the destruction of Jerusalem, the Scrolls had been hidden in caves by members of the Qumran community as they fled from Roman soldiers. Included among them is a complete manuscript of the book of Isaiah. The promises of Isaiah may have inspired John the Baptizer. Christians today believe they pointed to Jesus.

After Jesus had been baptized by John in the River Jordan and the voice from heaven had identified Him as the "Son of God," Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted. From there He began a ministry of preaching, healing and teaching.

John the Baptizer pointed to Jesus the Messiah. While John's preaching ministry alongside the Jordan had value in itself, it seems His whole life was a preparation for His one-sentence proclamation, "Behold the Lamb of God." Even more important is the Father's declaration which followed, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." "Son of God" is a title which gives us clues to the mystery concerning the person of Jesus. In Jesus, God draws near to His people. In Jesus, God confronts His people with His rule.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

1. We have very little detailed information on the gospels of the kind presented in the film about people like John. Biographical information concerning Jesus also is limited. That lack of detail tells us the purpose of the gospels is more than simply biographical. What do you understand to be the reasons the gospels were written (John 20:20-31; Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:14-17)?
2. The film describes a long period of preparation by John for a brief ministry. In a way it might be said that His ministry climaxed in one sentence and one act. Do you know of similar long preparations for short ministries? How did John prepare for ministry? How does his preparation compare to the way people prepare for the ministry today?
3. Though brief, John's ministry was a significant and important part of God's plan for saving His people. Why do you suppose God wanted the Messiah to have a forerunner (Luke 1:57-80; 3:1-22; 7:18-35)? In What ways can we be part of God's plan for the salvation of the world?
- 4 In Matthew's gospel, Jesus was known as "Son of God" only by those to whom God revealed Him as His Son (Matt. 16:17). How did God reveal to us that Jesus is the Son of God? Did we come to that knowledge in a way different from people in Jesus' day? If so, what is the difference? What are the ideas behind the various opinions people had in Mark 6:14-20 as to who Jesus was?

PRESERVATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

1. In the Dead Sea Scrolls we have the oldest known manuscripts of Old Testament books. Their discovery in 1947 brought Biblical scholars almost a thousand years closer to the manuscripts in which the revelation of God first was written down. The Dead Sea Scrolls can help us learn something about how the Scriptures have been passed on from generation to generation Their discovery also can help us understand the role of archeology in opening to us the pages of the Bible. How was God's hand evident in the discovery of the scrolls?
3. Archeological discoveries described in the film have provided us with much information concerning the Biblical world, its people and their culture. Have those discoveries made the Biblical story and its people more real for you? Why or why not?
4. Archeology supports the Biblical account of the events reported in the Scriptures. In what ways do you find this helpful to your faith? Is this verification necessary for your faith? How does the idea of verification apply to the event recorded in Luke 4:16-30?

THE ESSENES AND THE QUMRAN COMMUNITY

1. The Essenes were a Jewish sect spread throughout Palestine at the time of Jesus. They are not mentioned in the New Testament; however, they are believed to have influenced the entire Jewish community, including John the Baptizer. He may have been adopted as an orphan by this mainly celibate monastic order for men. The Essenes and the Qumran community were responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls. What evidence in the film supports or challenges the opinion of some scholars that the Essenes exerted a significant influence over John

the Baptizer and Jesus the Messiah? How does the possibility that John the Baptizer and Jesus may have been influenced by a religious group affect your image of the forerunner and the Messiah?

2. The film makes the point that the Essenes by their extreme legalistic views almost compelled traditional Judaism to become much more liberal. What are some effective ways to deal with extreme views rather than opposing them? Can you give some examples from the Christian community today?
3. Those who belonged to the religious parties among the Jews in Jesus' day did not believe Him to be the promised Messiah nor the Son of God. Many who believed in Jesus came from outside these religious groups. Why do you suppose it was difficult for religious people at the time of Jesus to accept Him as the Messiah? Why do you suppose it was easier for outsiders to believe in Him? Is it easier today to witness to someone who is a member of a non-Christian religion?
4. John may have learned about a baptism for repentance from the Qumran community. His understanding of the Messiah also could have been rooted in their understanding and studies of the Scriptures, Isaiah in particular. Invite group members to describe the various people, groups, and institutions which were responsible for group members' religious education.
5. The Qumran community was an exclusive community. They excluded the lame, the blind, the imperfect. The early Christian community was inclusive, inviting everyone to God's banquet table (Luke 14:7-24) In what ways do you see the church today as exclusive? As inclusive? If the church is exclusive, how can we help make it more like the early Christian church?

LOOKING AHEAD

Read Mark 1, John 4, and John 9.

PROGRAM 3: "The Voice And The Light" Part Two

INTRODUCTION

Capernaum, a city on the Sea of Galilee, became the center for Jesus' public ministry. Here He called His first disciples; the fishermen Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Near here He performed His first miracle, changing water to wine at the wedding in Cana. Here, at the house of Peter and Andrew, He healed the sick and forgave the sins of the paralyzed man. The film shows us where these events took place. We also see people who live today according to those same ancient patterns of life.

As Jesus traveled with His disciples, He cured a leper, restored sight to a blind man, and incurred the wrath of the religious authorities by violating their understanding of the Sabbath. In the final segment of this film we hear how Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. In her response we learn of an unqualified faith that Jesus is Savior of the world.

After Jesus cured a man suffering from leprosy, He warned him, "Don't tell anyone about this (Matt. 8:4). The need for that warning became apparent in the growing antagonism toward Jesus by the authorities after Jesus forgave a paralyzed man and restored sight to a blind man On the Sabbath. But there were other reactions to the early ministry of Jesus, too. Some religious people, like the Samaritan woman, responded in faith.

JESUS THE HEALER

1. In Mark 1 and 2 the accounts of healing miracles during the early ministry of Jesus vary from a simple report—"The fever left (Peter's mother-in-law) and she served them" (Mark 1:31)—to detailed descriptions of the circumstances and consequences of these healings. The focus shifts from the healings themselves to what they can tell us about Jesus and the variety of ways in which people responded to Him and His miracles. Ask the group to read Mark 1:21-34; 40-45; 2:1-12; and John 9:1-41) What are some of Jesus' reasons or motives for performing the miracles? List the ways the people who were healed and those who witnessed the healing responded.
2. Archeological work and films such as "Yeshua" bring us ever closer to events in the life of Jesus, yet, we never will be able to see them as well as did the Pharisee. However, we believe—and they did not. Do you feel Jesus performed the miracles in order to get people to believe? What did the miracles prove or demonstrate? Why do you suppose the Pharisees did not believe?
3. Jesus connected the paralyzed man's need for forgiveness with His need for healing. Jesus had power to meet both needs. What parallels do you see between unforgiven sin and broken health? What cautions should be exercised in connecting sin and sickness? What do you suppose Jesus was preaching about in Mark 2:3 just before they brought the paralyzed man to Him? His friends overcame barriers in bringing the paralyzed man to Jesus. What barriers stand in the way of your bringing your friends to Jesus? How could you break through these obstacles?
4. John took a full chapter to report the healing of the man born blind (John 9). In the course of that report the man's convictions became stronger and stronger as he was compelled to defend his experience and his faith. Discuss similar experiences of being pushed to a stronger faith by the challenges of others.

SABBATH LEGALITIES

1. Jesus' healing of the man born blind was controversial because it was performed on the Sabbath, the day of rest. Jesus' violation of established regulations created conflict between Himself and anti-religious authorities on several occasions. Ask the group members to recall some of the joyous Sabbath traditions described in the film. What similar rules and regulations concerning the Sabbath or Sunday are part of our Christian background and experience?

2. Do most of our customs and rules about the way we act on Sunday reflect prohibitions or requirements? That is, do they say what we should do or what we should not do? What difference is there between these two kinds of customs and rules?
3. The Jewish authorities were very protective of the Sabbath. They saw Jesus as a threat to a well-established pattern of belief and behavior. What did Jesus mean when He told the Pharisees, "The Sabbath was made for the good of man; man was not made for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27)?
4. In the film, Dr. Hammer of the Jewish Theological Seminary in Jerusalem says someone who observes the Sabbath is announcing, "I will cease on this day from doing anything which is creative. I will let God do all the creating and I will just admire what He has done." What does that understanding of the Sabbath say about the rule played in the world by God and by man? What do Ex. 16 and 20:8-11 suggest about God's motives in establishing the Sabbath?
5. The Sabbath observance presented in the film seemed meaningful and joyous. What changes could we make in our celebration of the Lord's Day to make it more meaningful and joyous?

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

1. Ask the group members to read John 4:1-42. What made the woman at the well an outcast? What seemed to be her attitude toward Jesus at the beginning of the encounter, and what was her attitude at the end? Why did it change? Who are the outcasts in today's world, and what might be their attitude toward the church?
2. The imagery of water is common throughout the Scripture. Recall some of those pictures from the Scriptures in Gen. 6:11-17; Ex. 14:15-18; I Cor. 10:1-2; Rom. 6:3-4; Ps. 22:14; Ps. 23:1-2; and John 13:4-17. What truths about God, man or man's relationship with God do those references explain? What does it seem the Samaritan woman thought Jesus was talking about in John 4:11-15?
3. What words or actions of Jesus seem to have convinced the Samaritan woman that Jesus was the Messiah? What led others in the town to believe?

LOOKING AHEAD

Read John 6:51-66; John 11; and Luke 19:41-44.

PROGRAM 4: "The Bread of Sacrifice" Part One

INTRODUCTION

This film traces the events of the last weeks of Jesus' life. His reference to Himself as the "Bread of life" (John 6:35) and His followers' reactions to that image become understandable when put into the historical perspective of the ancient practice of human sacrifice.

Viewers also learn the circumstances surrounding the raising of Lazarus from the dead, and the significance of that event for the developing conflict between Jesus and the leaders of the people. The film concludes with a detailed look at the fulfillment in 70 A.D. of Jesus' prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem.

SACRIFICE

1. Jesus' entire life as well as His words in John 6:51-66 addressed the age-old question of religious people in almost every culture: "How can man please his God?" Sacrifice of various kinds, including human sacrifice, was one answer. The offering of sacrifices is a tradition among God's people that begins in Genesis 4 with Cain and Abel. Ask the group members to read John 6:51-66. What does Jesus seem to be talking about? The responses of His followers may have been connected to their remembering the horrible sins of their forefathers referred to in Deut. 12:29-31; 2 Kings 23:1-10; Is. 57 and Jer. 32:26-35. Ask the group members to read those passages. Do Jesus' words seem to suggest a return to those terrible practices? Why or why not?
2. What mistaken notions about the function of sacrifices in general may have persisted among religious people in Jesus' day? What do you suppose they thought sacrifices could accomplish? What images of God and what kind of relationships between God and His people does the ritual of sacrifice suggest? What does God say about sacrifice in Micah 6:6-8 and Matt. 12:1-8?
3. In his teaching during the final weeks of his life, Jesus was suggesting another answer to the nagging question, "How do God's people please Him or win His favor?" From His words in John 6:51-58, what was the answer? Ask the group members to make a list of all the reasons for sacrifice given in Heb. 9:16-10:18 and compare the sacrifices of the Old Testament with Christ's sacrifice.
4. It is important to distinguish between Christ's sacrifice in payment for the sins of the whole world and self-sacrifice. The first is a sign of God's love for us. Self-sacrifice is a response to that love. The first is payment for guilt; the second is a thank offering for God's lifting of the burden of guilt. Ask the group members to read Luke 9:59-62; 14:26-33 and Matt. 16:24-25. Is Jesus asking His followers in these passages to make sacrifices of themselves? If so, why does He make such a demand?
5. What kinds of "crosses" do Christ's followers find it necessary to take up today? How are those crosses different from—and how are they the same as—the crosses the disciples carried in the first century?

DEATH AND LIFE

1. In the resurrection of Lazarus, Jesus showed His followers how they should think about life and death. As Dr. Hoffmann said in the film, it is likely that many of Jesus' followers already believed in the idea of the resurrection of the dead. Nevertheless, they must have been amazed not only by his raising Lazarus but also by his claim to be "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). Ask the group members to read John 11. What do you suppose the disciples and Martha thought Jesus meant when He called Himself "the resurrection and the life"? What different understanding might they have had of Jesus' claim after Lazarus had been raised?
2. Ask the group members to read and consider the attitudes and practices concerning death, burial, and mourning described in Gen. 49:20-50:26. How do those attitudes and practices compare with the attitudes and practices described in John 11? What things are different. What things are the same?
3. In John 12:24, Jesus compares His own death to a grain of wheat that must die before growing. Ask the group members to describe ways in which their experiences with death have been the beginning of growth.

THE DESTRUCTION OF A NATION

1. Jesus' prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44) brings to mind the question: How secure is the world when it ignores God? Ask the group members to compare Jesus' words about the destruction of Jerusalem with the warnings of the prophets in Is. 3:1-9; Jer. 9:6-11 and Amos 2:4-5. In Luke 21:22 Jesus speaks in Old Testament terms of the Day of Visitation or the Days of Punishment. The prophets used those phrases to point to the eventual result of national ungodliness: God's punishment. What emotions might Jesus' words have brought to the minds of Jesus' hearers? His prediction also must have brought to mind passages from the Old Testament such as Dan. 9:2-14 and Hosea 9:7. What seems to be God's intention in sending a Day of Visitation to Israel?
2. Jesus' prophecy was directed at a specific situation: Jerusalem in the 1st century A.D. We need to be careful not to draw too many parallels between the world then and the world today. North America, for instance, is not a new Israel. At the same time, Jesus' warnings can be focused on today's world in that they address our lack of spiritual insight as well as that of the world around us. Ask the group members to ask themselves the same rhetorical questions Jesus addressed to Jerusalem: Do we know what is needed for peace?
3. Ask the group to share their feelings about the idea that our world is in decline or is heading for destruction. What can they point to in support of their feelings?
4. In the face of possible world destruction, what roles should Christians try to play to avert such a catastrophe? Should Christians try to prevent it, or should they consider such a catastrophe as the inevitable conclusion of God's plan? How should Christians respond to the smaller yet equally devastating disasters in individual lives such as loss of a loved one, breakup of a family, natural disasters? What help does God provide to enable his people to face such disasters?

LOOKING AHEAD

Read Matthew—Chapters 5, 23, and 26.

PROGRAM 4: “The Bread of Sacrifice” Part Two

INTRODUCTION

In this film, viewers are shown the events of Holy Week, including the cleansing of the temple, discussions with the Pharisees, and the incident with the woman caught in adultery. The film ends with a description of the events of Maundy Thursday, including the Last Supper and Jesus’ arrest.

HYPOCRISY

1. Jesus demanded more from His followers than the outward observance of religion. Worship and obedience to God’s Word was to be a matter of heart, mind, spirit, and will. At the same time, genuine religion had to be demonstrated in behavior. Ask the group members to read Lev. 26:3-17; Deut. 10:12-13; and Ecc1. 12:13-14. What reasons for outward obedience to the Law are given there? Do those words still apply to Christians in the New Testament? Why or why not?
2. The Pharisees were devout laymen whose spiritual ancestors had preserved the Hebrew language and the Law during the period of captivity. They pointed to obedience to the Law as the measure of Israel’s good fortunes and were confident that God would favor those who obeyed the Law by sending the Messiah to deliver them from the Romans. With the weight of history behind them, the Pharisees were popular with the common people because their actions demonstrated the truth of what they believed. Jesus, however, accused them of making empty rituals of obedience to the Law. In what ways are Jesus’ reprimands of the Pharisees in Matt. 23:13-36 similar to those of the prophets in Is. 29:13-14 and 58:1--12? In what ways are Jesus’ warnings different from those issued by the prophets? What words of judgment from Jesus and the prophets apply to our own religious life?
3. Sometimes what may appear to be empty ritual to an observer could actually be a strong personal commitment to the faith and an attempt to witness to it. What are some advantages and disadvantages of showing our faith through outward signs such as crossing ourselves, wearing religious jewelry, saying grace before a meal in a restaurant, putting religious bumper stickers on our cars, etc.?
4. Ask the group members to recall times when they felt they were being hypocritical about their religion? What did they do about the feeling. Help the group members to take comfort from knowing that by recognizing sin in ourselves we are opening ourselves up to the gracious forgiveness God offers. No one should claim to be free of hypocrisy; all of us depend on God’s forgiveness and that of our fellow believers when we fail.

EXAMINING PRIORITIES

1. During Jesus' final week, He was confronted with a variety of situations in which He pointed out or was asked about what really was important. Even while facing His own suffering and death, Jesus was helping His followers sort out priorities in their lives. Ask the group members to compare the following sayings and actions in Jesus' last days with His teachings in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, Matt. 21:12-13 (cleansing the temple); John 8:1-11 (The Woman Caught in Adultery); Luke 20:20-26 (The Question About Paying Taxes); Luke 20:45-46 (Jesus' Warning About the Teachers of the Law); John 13:12-17 (Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet).
2. In His Sermon on the Mount and in the events of His last week, Jesus speaks to His followers as though setting new priorities were something they could do as a matter of free choice. They could decide to serve others instead of themselves; they could decide to refrain from condemning others too quickly; they could decide to give to Caesar what was his; they could decide to settle disputes peacefully. To what extent are we able to set our own priorities in life and to what extent are our priorities imposed on us by others? Where do Christians get their priorities from? What obstacles often must be overcome in the process of adopting those priorities?
3. How can members of the Christian community help each other in practical ways to focus on those things that Christ says are essential in the Kingdom of God? What do Matt. 6:25-33 and 1 Tim. 6:6-11 say to us about priorities?

THE GIFT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

1. On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper a meal with profound meaning for Christians. Our grasp of the significance of the Lord's Supper is enhanced by an understanding of the Passover. On the basis of Ex. 12:1-14 and 1 Cor. 11:23-26, what similarities do you see between the Passover meal depicted in the film and our contemporary observance of the Lord's Supper?
2. What is the effect of Jesus' using the occasion of Passover to institute the Lord's Supper? Does He seem to be offering a substitute for it, changing it, or adding to it? The Passover is a Jewish celebration and the Lord's Supper is a Christian celebration. How do you feel about Christians celebrating the Passover today by changing or reinterpreting elements of it to conform to Christian teachings? Do you think such Christian Passovers are offensive to Jews? Why or why not?
3. What other important events in the history of God's people besides the Lord's Supper, Christmas, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost should be celebrated in the church with some special rituals? Why should those events be celebrated? How should they be celebrated? What events in our own lifetime should the church celebrate?
4. Are there any valuable parts of our spiritual legacy, such as events in the church's history, heroes of faith, etc., that you feel are losing the importance they once had? If so why is that happening? How important to our faith is a sense of our being connected to the whole history of God's people?

LOOKING AHEAD

Read Mark 14:53-15:32; Luke 22:66-23:49; and John 18:19-19:50.

PROGRAM 5: “Ripples of Darkness, Waves of Light” Part One

INTRODUCTION

While many of the events in the life of Jesus are reported in only one of several of the Gospels, all four Gospels tell about Jesus’ suffering, crucifixion and death. The importance of those events is evident also in the Apostle’s Creed which mentions only three people by name: Jesus; Mary; and Pontius Pilate, the man who signed Jesus’ order of execution. “Ripples of Darkness, Waves of Light” tells the story of Pilate, the man who became famous not because of his success as a Roman politician but because of his brief encounter with Jesus of Nazareth.

In addition to what was known about Pontius Pilate from the Bible and Jewish historians, Dr. Paul L. Maier, author of *First Easter*, tells about new discoveries in secular sources regarding the Roman governor. The film also shows the involvement of Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (The Jewish Council) in the trial and conviction of Jesus.

PILATE: POLITICAL JUDGE

1. Talk about the person of Pilate and his conversations with Jesus and the Jews. Discuss the tension that can exist between political and religious convictions in all of us.
2. Talk about the person who played the part of Pilate in the film. If you were directing a play about Jesus’ life, would you pick a nice-looking person with a pleasant personality to play Pilate? Why or why not? How is Pilate usually portrayed in films you have seen?
3. We speak Pilate’s name each time we confess our faith in either the Apostle’s or Nicene Creeds. In your opinion, when we say “suffered under Pontius Pilate” are we accusing Pilate of committing a crime or are we simply reporting an historical fact?
4. In your opinion was Pilate more interested in justice for Jesus or primarily about the political situation in Jerusalem? What makes you think so? Can you give instances from your own life when you decided or were tempted to do something because it was easier at the time rather than because it was right? Do politicians face these kinds of choices more often than others?
5. What were the advantages of combining the roles of governor and judge in Pilate’s day? What were the disadvantages of such a combination? How would a combination of these roles work in our society?

6. Ask the group members to read Matt. 27:11-31; Mark 15:1-20; Luke 23:1-25; and John 18:28-19:16 and to share their impressions of what those accounts suggest as the way Pilate and Jesus felt about each other.

7. In your opinion, when Pilate sentenced Jesus to death was he a spokesman for: (a) himself, (b) Rome, (c) the Jewish Council, (d) the Jewish people, or (e) all humanity?

CAIAPHAS: POLITICAL PRIEST

1. The trial has sometimes been used by Christians as a reason to be critical of Jewish people. Jewish people of our time have said that they dread the annual Lenten season because they know their Christian friends and neighbors once again will hear in the churches how bad the Jews are. The trial of Jesus, however, is not a story of the Jews against God. Caiaphas was a Jew, but so was Jesus. Members of the Council were Jewish, but so were the disciples. We ought to be able to recognize ourselves in all of the people in the passion story. Read John 11:49-52. Caiaphas said, "Don't you realize that it is better for you to have one man die for the people instead of having the whole nation destroyed?" What do these words mean if you read them as spoken by Caiaphas the enemy of Jesus? What do they mean if you hear them spoken by Caiaphas, spokesman for the Jewish religion to the Roman authorities? When might Caiaphas' words have described the philosophy of someone in our own time?

2. Does what we hear a person say depend on how we feel about that person? Can you give examples? If we are upset with a person, are we more likely to find fault with what he or she says? If we are pleased with a person, are we more likely to agree with what the person says? Why or why not? Invite the group members to give examples of times when others have agreed or disagreed with them, not on the basis of fact but on the basis of how the other people felt about them.

3. Ask three members of the group to read aloud Caiaphas' question and three others to read aloud Jesus' answer in Matt. 26:63-64; Mark 14:61-62; and Luke 22:70. What are the various ways in which the question and answer can be spoken? How do you feel they were spoken in Jesus' time? Why?

4. Do you think the answer given by Jesus in Matthew and Luke suggests He was trying to avoid the question? What other reason could be given for Jesus' indirect answer? Do you think Jesus was trying to show the council char they did nor want to listen to His answer? What would be the point of showing them that? If you were in a public place and someone asked you the question, "Do you believe in the Messiah, the Son of the blessed God?" do you think you should give a direct answer As Jesus did in Mark, or an indirect one as He did in the other two Gospels? Why? If you were in a private discussion about faith and the other person asked you the same question, which kind of answer might be best? Would the indirect answer evoke more conversation? Why or why not?

5. Ask the group members to read the Council's response to Jesus' answer in Matt. 26:65; Mark 14:65-68; and Luke 22:71. One of the definitions of blasphemy is "the crime of assuming to oneself the rights or qualities of God." Would blasphemy be regarded as a crime in today's world? As a sin? If any person other than Jesus were to answer Caiaphas' question as He did, would it actually be blasphemy?

6. Perhaps the most intriguing element in the crucifixion story comes in the form of the actual arrest notice for Jesus quoted in Jewish rabbinical tradition. It says, "Wanted, Jesus the Nazarene. He shall be stoned because He has practiced sorcery and has incited Israel to apostasy." What events and sayings of Jesus do you think the notice might be referring to?

SUFFERED, CRUCIFIED AND DIED

1. Ask the group members to read Matt. 26:57-27:44; Mark 14:53-15:32; Luke 22:66-23:49; and John 18:12-19:30. According to these accounts, in what ways did Jesus suffer under Pontius Pilate? What were the major events that happened between the time He was nailed to the cross and the time He died? What statements show that He died?

2. Ask one member of the group to read Ps. 22 aloud as the others follow along. Ask the group to stop the leader each time they find something that parallels or is related in some other way to the account of Jesus' suffering and death as described in the Gospels. Do the same thing with Is. 52:13 through 53:12. God knew what would happen to His Son. Suffering and death were part of the plan to save the world. It was not a matter of Jesus' losing the battle when He died and then having God come in to save the situation with the resurrection. How do the Old Testament passages help us understand the purpose in Jesus' suffering and dying? Do you think suffering and death sometimes are part of God's plan for our lives?

3. Read the first Christian sermon in Acts 2:17-36 and find references in it to the suffering and death of Christ. Why did the early Christians emphasize Christ's suffering and death? Why do we continue that emphasis today?

4. Invite the group members to read Acts 10:34-43, 13:26-35, and 1 Cor. 2:1-5. What are some of the points Peter and Paul are trying to make by their references to Jesus' suffering and death? How would the meanings of the Christmas and Easter stories be changed if the suffering and death of Christ were omitted? What has happened in your life that helps you understand and appreciate the suffering and death of Christ?

LOOKING AHEAD

Read Matt. 27:45-28:20; Mark 15:33-16:20; Luke 23:50-24:53; and John 19:31-21:25.

PROGRAM 5: "Ripples of Darkness, Waves of Light" Part Two

INTRODUCTION

The final segment of "Yeshua" describes the events of Christ's burial and resurrection from the dead. In this film Dr. Hoffmann explains the Jewish customs of burial at the time of Christ and also describes the precautions taken by those who killed Him to guarantee that no fake resurrection could be staged. The historical facts of the event are examined in an interview with Dr. Paul L. Maier, the author of *First Easter*.

The film also gives a detailed and balanced analysis of the Shroud of Turin. Through interviews with scientists and the recounting of the few known facts regarding the shroud, the film gives the viewers an opportunity to evaluate the possible relationship of the Shroud of Turin to the resurrection of Christ.

“Yeshua” concludes with the ascension of Christ into heaven with His great Commission to spread the Gospel throughout the world and His promise to be with those who believe in Him.

A PLACE TO BE BURIED

1. Ask the group members to read Matt. 27:57-61; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; and John 19:38-42 and compare the details in each account. How many people knew where the burial took place? What was unusual about Jesus’ being buried in a rich man’s cemetery? What do you imagine might have been some alternatives to burial in Joseph’s tomb? Why did Joseph have to get permission from Pilate before he could claim the body? Why do you suppose Pilate gave him permission?
2. What are some of the major differences between the burial practices at the time of Jesus and now? Did burial mean to be “covered up” as it does now?
3. Jesus frequently had stated that He would die, but He had made no burial plans. What did His lack of plans show about His attitude toward His own death and burial? Can you recall any occasion in Jesus’ life when He planned for the future?
4. Why did Joseph and Nicodemus wait until After Jesus’ death to show publicly their devotion to Him? Should they be faulted for that? Why or why not? Ask group members to share some of their experiences when they were afraid to show their faith.

THE THIRD DAY HE AROSE

1. Read Matt. 28:1-15; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-10; and 1 Cor. 15:1-11. Who were the witnesses to the resurrection? Did they have anything in common before that event? Why did some people doubt those who first claimed Jesus had risen from the dead? Why did others believe the witnesses? Which of the witnesses of the resurrection do you feel was the most believable? Why do you feel that person is more believable than the others? What makes the story of Jesus’ resurrection believable to us almost 20 centuries after it first was reported? What makes you a believable witness today when you speak of Christ’s victory over death? What, if anything, would make it difficult for others to believe your testimony?
2. Why do you suppose Jesus’ friends apparently did not remember that He had said He would rise from the dead? List the steps Jesus’ enemies took to prevent His body from disappearing. In the film, Dr. Maier pointed out that the people who claimed the body was stolen were giving evidence that the tomb was empty. In your opinion, why didn’t the friends of Jesus search for His body so they could complete the burial process? Why didn’t the enemies of Jesus search for the body to prove He had not risen from the dead?

3. Christianity is the only religion that does not have a tomb for its founder. Why is the lack of a tomb an important part of the Christian message? How does the resurrection of Christ from the dead affect your view of death? How does it affect your view of life? How does it affect the way you live with the causes of death?

THE SHROUD OF TURIN

1. Help the group members to review some of the facts about the shroud as presented in the film.
 - a. Current interest in the shroud started in 1978 when an international team of 32 scientists used contemporary scientific processes and equipment to analyze it.
 - b. The shroud can be traced back in history to France in the 1350's.
 - c. The image on the cloth is a negative; that is, natural light and shading of the image are reversed. What should appear light to the natural eye appears dark. The effect is that of looking at a photographic negative instead of a photograph.
 - d. The cloth is twice the length of a person. The image on it is that of a body laid on the cloth with the feet at one end and the head near the middle. Then the cloth was folded over the top of the body, producing an impression of both the front and back of a body.
 - e. The body image on the cloth is that of a male about 5 feet 11 inches in height and weighing about 165 to 170 pounds. The body shows wounds at the wrists, on the back and shoulders, in the side and feet, and around the crown of the head.

2. Is the Shroud of Turin proof that Jesus rose from the dead? If not, what does it prove? Ask the group members to read 1 Cor. 15:1-11, Heb. 11:1; and John 19:30-31 and 20:29. On what evidence do we base our faith in Christ's resurrection from the dead?

3. Has the attention given to the Shroud of Turin been helpful in strengthening the faith of those who already believe in Christ and in their sharing of that faith with those who do not believe? In what ways do you think the same attention to the shroud has put Christians in a difficult position when it comes to witnessing to the faith?

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