



A Walking Tour *of the* Gospels

EXPERIENCE THE LIFE
AND LESSONS OF JESUS



JOHN A. BECK

“For the disciples living in the first century, Jesus’s teachings were tangible, practical, and real. That sense of immediacy has often become lost amidst voluminous commentaries on the Gospels that have overstuffed bookshelves in the twenty centuries since. John A. Beck’s newest book, *A Walking Tour of the Gospels*, makes Jesus’s words accessible again. Each chapter is concise, to the point, and relevant, bringing a breath of fresh air to the divine-human touch of Jesus. Start your day with a stroll through *A Walking Tour of the Gospels*. Your journey will be blessed on the way.”

—**PAUL WRIGHT, president emeritus, Jerusalem University College**

“Weaving important cultural, geographical, and historical elements to each story, Dr. Beck has an extraordinary gift for reaching and communicating the heart of the gospel. . . . Offers a wealth of wonder, hope, comfort, and peace.”

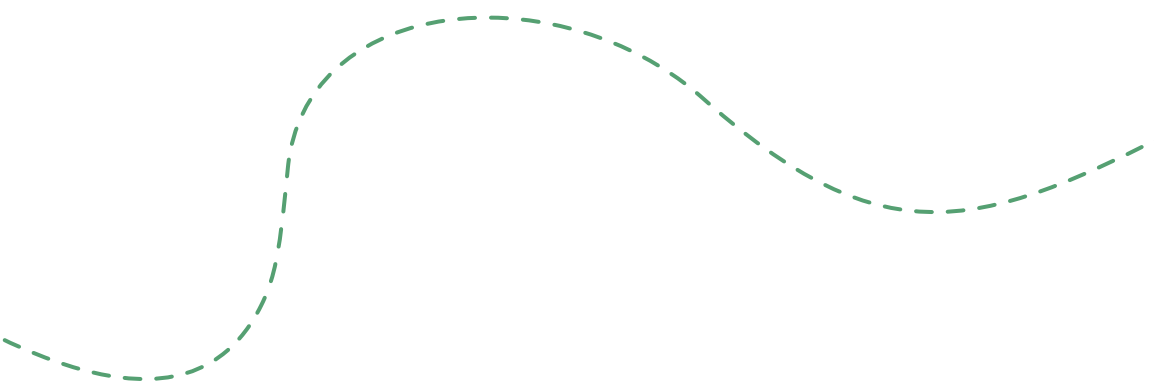
—**MARILYN STULL, trainer and Bible study teacher,
Precept Ministries International**

“By pairing the background to the meaning of each gospel story, Beck has created a field guide to the Bible, brilliantly incorporating Jesus’s invitational challenge of ‘Come, follow me’ in a way that will serve to benefit any Bible reader!”

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“Dr. John Beck has the unique ability to combine geographical insights with the practical application of biblical truth. His experience in the land of the Bible has equipped him well to share his personal insights in a way that will impact the spiritual lives of his readers. I have been personally blessed by John’s books and enthusiastically recommend *A Walking Tour of the Gospels*. Reading his new book is like taking a hike through the Gospels with an experienced guide and spiritual leader.”

—**J. CARL LANEY, professor emeritus,
Western Seminary, Portland, Oregon**



“Brief and yet powerful exposition of numerous gospel accounts relating to Jesus’s earthly ministry. . . . Jack helps us see good ways to connect the realities of the land of the Bible with our understanding of God’s Word.”

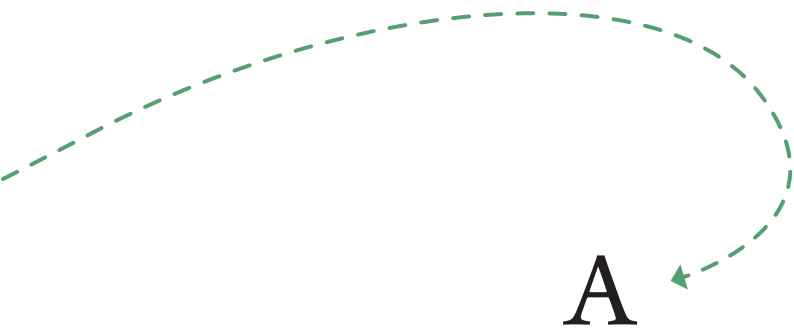
—**MICHAEL A. GRISANTI, PhD, Old Testament department chair,
distinguished research professor of Old Testament,
The Master’s Seminary, Los Angeles, California**

“It is good to follow a Bible teacher going through the Bible and understanding the historical and geographical settings of the biblical text. I am so happy to see this book in print for our devotional reading, too. I highly recommend this book. You will be blessed as you read through 150 key events of the Gospels.”

—**REV. TAN ENG BOO, pastor, Life Bible-Presbyterian
Church, Singapore**

“In short vignettes, Jack tours some 150 gospel stories using a simple format of asking who and where, what is this text about, and what does this text teach? Along the way, this consummate geographer and biblical scholar offers some memorable and pithy insights sure to find their way into any preacher’s message. . . . This is a book that will stay on my desk and will be opened countless times.”

—**C. CHAPPELL TEMPLE, PhD, lead pastor,
Christ Church, Sugar Land, Texas**



A
Walking Tour
of the
Gospels

Experience the
Life and Lessons of Jesus

JOHN A. BECK



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Dedicated to my compassionate and loving soul mate, Marmy,
and to our gifted and adventurous grandchildren

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Abbreviations

Old Testament

Gen.	▶	Genesis	Eccl.	▶	Ecclesiastes
Ex.	▶	Exodus	Song	▶	Song of Songs
Lev.	▶	Leviticus	Isa.	▶	Isaiah
Num.	▶	Numbers	Jer.	▶	Jeremiah
Deut.	▶	Deuteronomy	Lam.	▶	Lamentations
Josh.	▶	Joshua	Ezek.	▶	Ezekiel
Judg.	▶	Judges	Dan.	▶	Daniel
Ruth	▶	Ruth	Hos.	▶	Hosea
1 Sam.	▶	1 Samuel	Joel	▶	Joel
2 Sam.	▶	2 Samuel	Amos	▶	Amos
1 Kings	▶	1 Kings	Obad.	▶	Obadiah
2 Kings	▶	2 Kings	Jonah	▶	Jonah
1 Chron.	▶	1 Chronicles	Mic.	▶	Micah
2 Chron.	▶	2 Chronicles	Nah.	▶	Nahum
Ezra	▶	Ezra	Hab.	▶	Habakkuk
Neh.	▶	Nehemiah	Zeph.	▶	Zephaniah
Est.	▶	Esther	Hag.	▶	Haggai
Job	▶	Job	Zech.	▶	Zechariah
P(s)s.	▶	Psalms	Mal.	▶	Malachi
Prov.	▶	Proverbs			

New Testament

Matt.	▶	Matthew	1 Tim.	▶	1 Timothy
Mark	▶	Mark	2 Tim.	▶	2 Timothy
Luke	▶	Luke	Titus	▶	Titus
John	▶	John	Philem.	▶	Philemon
Acts	▶	Acts	Heb.	▶	Hebrews
Rom.	▶	Romans	James	▶	James
1 Cor.	▶	1 Corinthians	1 Peter	▶	1 Peter
2 Cor.	▶	2 Corinthians	2 Peter	▶	2 Peter
Gal.	▶	Galatians	1 John	▶	1 John
Eph.	▶	Ephesians	2 John	▶	2 John
Phil.	▶	Philippians	3 John	▶	3 John
Col.	▶	Colossians	Jude	▶	Jude
1 Thess.	▶	1 Thessalonians	Rev.	▶	Revelation
2 Thess.	▶	2 Thessalonians			

Introduction

Part of me is from there. I was not born in Israel. But each year, I spend months in the Holy Land studying its geography and exploring its ancient culture. I have walked the trails Jesus walked, contemplated the views he used to teach, enjoyed the scent of the soil and flowers he smelled, felt the soft rain and hard stone he touched. These experiences have changed me and changed the way I read the story of Jesus in the Gospels.

My students at Jerusalem University College have shared in this learning adventure and changed as well. With every walk and through every experience, their Bible reading transformed. Now, it's your turn. I will take you on a tour of more than 150 gospel stories, each seen through the lens of the Holy Land.

In less time than it takes to share a cup of coffee, I will put the spotlight on a verse or set of verses that best captures the heart of the story. I will remind you who is involved and where the story is taking place. In a phrase, I will explain what the text is talking about. And in a sentence, I will summarize what the text teaches. Then I will take you on a tour of the story, highlighting what I see as someone who is from there.

Of course, it's impossible to see it all or say all there is to say about a given story. So I will limit our tour to places that offer the most significant insights. And I will direct most of the presentation to how those places impact our understanding of what Jesus said and did. That means I will leave

a lot unsaid. So, what I have chosen not to do in this book is just as important as what I have chosen to do. First, you will note that I have not followed a published harmony of the Gospels but developed a harmony of my own. As a result, the cross-references in your Bible may not fully match mine. Also, I have chosen to comment sparingly on the differences we sometimes find between gospel accounts that recount the same event. If those differences are of interest, I encourage you to consult other reference works on that topic. Having covered these preliminaries, it's time to get started!

John walked this land with Jesus, and the experience changed him. “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life” (1 John 1:1). John encountered the message of Jesus bonded to the soil, scenery, and people of the Holy Land. We seek the same in this guided tour of the Gospels.

CHAPTER 1

Birth and Early Years of Jesus



GENEALOGIES OF JESUS

Matthew 1:1–17; Luke 3:23–38

“... and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.”

(Matthew 1:16)

▶ **WHO**

Adam, Abraham, Judah, David, Joseph, Jesus

▶ **WHAT IS THIS TEXT TALKING ABOUT?**

The family tree of Jesus

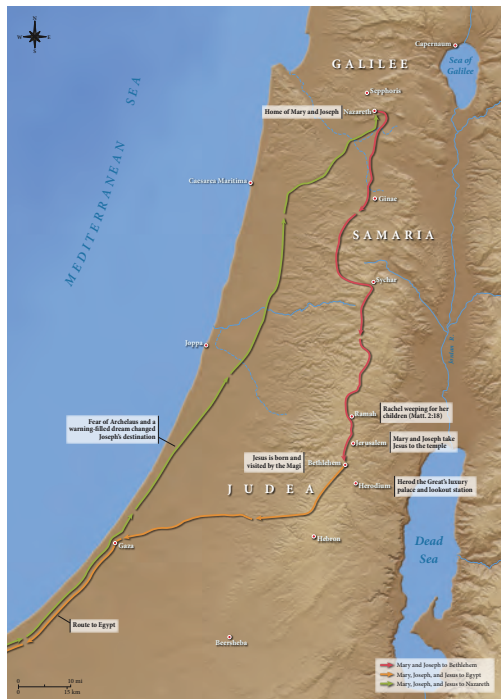
▶ **WHAT DOES THIS TEXT TEACH?**

Jesus qualifies as the Savior from sin because he has the necessary family tree.

You must be kidding. The first words from God, after four hundred years of silence, are a genealogy! Why should I bother reading a list of names, many of which I can't even pronounce? Before you surrender, let's see if I can convince you that a slow, thoughtful reading of the genealogy of Jesus has much to offer.

First, the reading of the genealogies helps us appreciate how long the world had waited for Jesus and how perilous the wait had been. Each name represents a full generation. Read the verses slowly and sense the hundreds of years slipping by. Think of the sin-debt accumulating over all those centuries. And consider the challenges that threatened the plan of salvation at every turn. It navigated past childless couples, unfaithful husbands, murders, and even exile from the Promised Land. The genealogies help us appreciate the world's long wait for Jesus and the many challenges the Lord overcame.

Second, notice the names that stand out in the list. Matthew includes four women. In Bible times, your relationship to the extended family was determined by your father or stepfather. So why does Matthew include Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Uriah's wife (Bathsheba)? Perhaps it anticipates the countercultural inclusion of women championed in Jesus's ministry, one that even counted women among his disciples (Luke 8:2–3). And what is more, two (Rahab and Ruth, if not all four women) were Gentiles! This reminds us that Jesus came to pay the sin-debt for all people.



And finally, a careful reading of the genealogies demonstrates that Jesus is qualified to be the Savior from sin promised in the Old Testament. This Savior could not merely simulate the human experience; he had to be fully human, a descendant of Adam and Eve born through Mary. But not just any mortal would do. Jesus had to have the correct family tree. The genealogies demonstrate that Jesus counted Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Judah, and David as his forebears. And the very last male in the list before Jesus was key to it all. Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus. But as Jesus's stepfather, he gave Jesus the legal connection to the correct family tree.

For Further Reference: Genesis 3:15; 12:1–3; 21:12; 28:3–4; 49:10; 2 Samuel 7:8–17; Psalm 89:35–37



THE CONCEPTION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST ANNOUNCED

Luke 1:5–25

“And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” (Luke 1:17)

▶ WHO

Zechariah, Elizabeth, John the Baptist

▶ WHAT IS THIS TEXT TALKING ABOUT?

The birth of John the Baptist

► WHAT DOES THIS TEXT TEACH?

John the Baptist is the promised “Elijah” whose birth signals the imminent arrival of the Messiah.

Zechariah and Elizabeth lived an ordinary life. Zechariah was a priest, but not one of the aristocratic priests who worked full-time at the Temple in Jerusalem. He was among the common priests eligible to work two weeks a year at lower-level Temple tasks. A late eighth-century tradition says the couple lived in En Kerem, a tiny village about four miles (6.5 kilometers) west of the sacred precinct in Jerusalem. Like so many others in Judah, they farmed and raised livestock to meet their family’s needs.

What most stood out was that this couple was childless. That was a big deal in a culture where your children were vital to your identity and well-being. And now that both were advanced in age, what would happen when time robbed them of their ability to care for themselves? We feel pity for but expect little from this challenged couple.

That brings us to the moment this ordinary story takes several extraordinary turns. First, Zechariah was chosen by lot to refresh the incense that smoldered on the altar of incense within the Temple itself. This was an exceptional honor that put him within arm’s reach of the ark of the covenant, the throne of the Lord on earth. Given the thousands of ordinary priests available for such service, it’s unlikely Zechariah had experienced this honor before. And given his advanced age, Zechariah’s first opportunity would be his last.

As Zechariah was standing before the incense altar, watching the smoke rise that symbolized the prayers of the Lord’s people, the angel Gabriel appeared. The Lord sent this celestial messenger to announce that Zechariah’s prayer had been heard. He and Elizabeth would have a son!

And just when we think we have arrived at the pinnacle of the story, it takes another remarkable turn. Their son would be “Elijah.” Elijah was an outstanding prophet in the Old Testament. But this was not that Elijah.

The very last thing we read in the book of Malachi is that the Lord would send a new “Elijah” to prepare people to meet the promised Savior from sin. Zechariah and Elizabeth’s son, John, was that Elijah. And that meant the world was about to witness the redeeming work of the Messiah in real time.

For Further Reference: Exodus 30:7–8; Malachi 3:1; 4:5–6; Matthew 7:7–14



THE CONCEPTION OF JESUS ANNOUNCED TO MARY

Luke 1:26–38

“You will conceive and give birth to a son,
and you are to call him Jesus.” (Luke 1:31)

▶ **WHO & WHERE**

Mary, Jesus, Nazareth

▶ **WHAT IS THIS TEXT TALKING ABOUT?**

The conception of Jesus

▶ **WHAT DOES THIS TEXT TEACH?**

Mary would conceive Jesus in a miraculous way.

If there was one person who needed to know the plan, it was Mary. Within her body the Spirit would weld together the human and divine natures of Jesus. And because this miracle occurred in Nazareth, it guaranteed that this great honor would come with grave distain.

Nazareth was a small, rural village whose topography limited its size and shaped its culture. It sat atop a near-vertical 1,100-foot (335-meter)

ridge. But residents did not enjoy the commanding view offered by the ridge because the village itself was recessed into the bottom of a valley on top of that ridge. The fertility of this pleasant valley provided just enough resources to sustain a village of about three hundred residents. And the isolation of this valley attracted a certain kind of resident, those who wished to remain faithful to the Lord and separate themselves from the pagan influence of the world beyond. Here, marriages were arranged between local families, like that of Mary and Joseph. This indicates something about Mary's age. She was a young teen, twelve to thirteen years of age, who was excited about her coming wedding and anxious to raise a family with her beloved Joseph. But her excitement was about to give way to shock.

God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary to deliver a birth announcement, her birth announcement. It is peppered with language related to the coming Messiah. Mary's son would be named Jesus, a name which means "the Lord saves." He would not be the biological son of Joseph but the "Son of the Most High," a descendant of David who would rule an eternal kingdom. There was no mistaking the message. Mary would give birth to the promised Savior from sin. What a privilege!

But this is not the kind of news easily broken to your family, your village, and your husband. No one had ever conceived a child like this. And while a pregnancy prior to marriage might be glanced over with a wink and a nod in other places, culturally conservative Nazareth was not that place. It was a good thing Gabriel was going to go with her to share the news. Oh wait! "Then the angel left her" (Luke 1:38). In a place where chastity was championed and shame was shared, this young teen had to deliver this news alone.

If you have not appreciated the gravity of her assignment, this is the moment. If you have not paused to give thanks for her, now is the time. Mary's incredible honor came with a grave challenge because this was a Nazareth story.

***For Further Reference:* 2 Samuel 7:8–16; Isaiah 7:14; 9:6–7; Romans 1:3–4; Galatians 4:4–5; Hebrews 1:8**



MARY VISITS ELIZABETH

Luke 1:39–56

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!” (Luke 1:42)

➤ **WHO & WHERE**

Mary and Elizabeth, hill country of Judea

➤ **WHAT IS THIS TEXT TALKING ABOUT?**

Mary’s humility

➤ **WHAT DOES THIS TEXT TEACH?**

Mary’s humble origins did not prevent the Lord from doing extraordinary things through her.

Could it really be so? This question was circulating through the households of Nazareth. One of their own, a young teen was pregnant prior to her wedding night. She claimed an angel visited her to tell her that her conception was special. She would give birth to Jesus the Savior. Really? The doubts of her family and friends likely motivated Mary’s quick dash south to visit her cousin Elizabeth. We follow along because their initial conversation answers the question raised in Nazareth. Could it really be so?

Elizabeth’s words carry weight. She was a descendant of Aaron living near Jerusalem who was married to the priest Zechariah. She was a senior citizen who’d experienced a miraculous pregnancy of her own. But beyond that, the Holy Spirit filled her when Mary’s greeting reached her ears. The infant Elizabeth carried in her womb signaled the Spirit’s arrival and the next words we hear are the Lord’s own. In them, Elizabeth repeatedly utters the word “blessed.”



The traditional home of Elizabeth was En Kerem, located on the distant ridge.

That is significant. Different forms of the word “bless” appear five times in Genesis 12:1–3 building in force and emphasis until we come to the last. “All peoples [or nations] on earth will be blessed” through one of Abraham’s descendants. Elizabeth’s repeated use of “blessed” assures us and Mary that she is now connected with this long-standing promise. Her son would restore the blessing lost in Eden.

Then it was Mary’s turn. She bursts into the magnificent song that became known as the Magnificat. The same Spirit who filled Elizabeth now led Mary to weave a song from the songs and psalms of the Old Testament. Mary acknowledged she was a humble person from a humble place. No one important came from Nazareth and nothing of consequence happened there. Yet her song reminds us of the Lord’s long-standing habit of using humble people to accomplish magnificent things. And Mary concludes, like her cousin, by declaring that the promise given to Abraham was being realized in her.

That is why the Lord took us on this trip with Mary. Here we see two amazing ladies, one from Galilee and one from Judea, rise above the ordinariness of their humble circumstances to answer God’s call. Their words carry us back to the first promises of a Savior given to Abraham and knit that story into their own.

***For Further Reference:* Genesis 12:1–3; 1 Samuel 2:1–10; Psalms 103:17; 107:9; 138:6; James 1:9**

“A hike through the Gospels with an experienced guide and spiritual leader.”

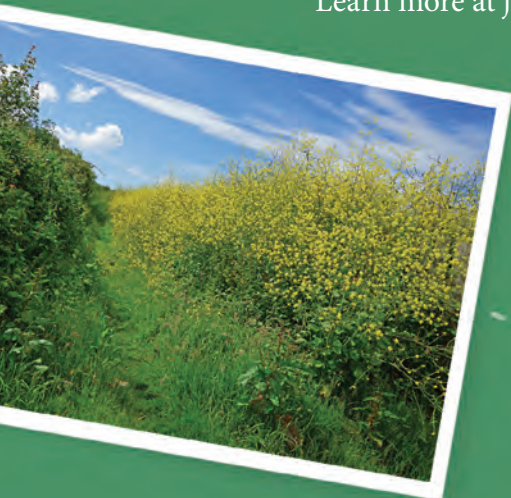
—J. CARL LANEY

Enjoy what's best about walking tours from the comfort of your living room: learn the unique and hidden details of a place, immerse yourself in its sights and sounds, and discover new wonder in the where, when, and who.

John Beck will transform the way you understand the life of Jesus. In 150 key events from the Gospels with 70 photos plus maps and charts, you will explore Jesus's teachings in his context, bringing the Bible into living color—and bringing Jesus closer to your heart than ever before.

Dr. John A. Beck is a scholar and educator, who has been writing on the topic of biblical geography for more than twenty years, both within and outside of the Middle East. With a PhD in theology (Hebrew and Old Testament) from Trinity International University, he is an adjunct faculty member at Jerusalem University College in Israel.

Learn more at johnabeckauthor.com.



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