

How Jesus Met Life Questions

HARRISON S. ELLIOTT

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FOREWORD

The title of this book exactly explains its purpose and viewpoint. This is not a book about the Bible, but is intended as a guide, through personal study and group discussion, to a direct study of the New Testament record to find "how Jesus met life questions." The topic or problem of each chapter is stated in present-day form. The individual students and the group members are challenged to consider for themselves both the present-day issue and the issue Jesus faced, to see how Jesus met the problem. Each one is asked to reach his own conclusion as to what Jesus' ideal really was, and to apply this heroically in relation to the present-day problems as he meets them.

It is hoped that those who use the book will read and study the records of Jesus' life eagerly, open-mindedly, as if coming to them for the first time. Earnest attempt has been made not to bias in any way the thinking and conclusions of those who use the book. There is no particular set of ideas regarding the life and teachings of Jesus which the author is attempting to set forth. The purpose is to get others to form ideas of their own rather than to adopt those which may appeal to him.

Only such modern questions have been introduced into each chapter as seem in their real issue and problem to be the same as Jesus faced and upon which it seems fair to go to the life of Jesus for direct help as to his viewpoint. A major question at present is whether Jesus' ideals and principles will really work in the modern world. In answering this question, too often Jesus' life and teachings are warped to confirm some opinion that a person already holds, or some current idea of that for which Jesus stood is accepted. An earnest attempt has been made here to stimulate open-minded reading of the records, so that each individual or group may come to his own viewpoint as to Jesus' attitude and idea on the problem in hand.

Each chapter has three sections. After a brief introductory statement of the problem or question of the chapter, the *Bible references* are printed out. The Moffatt translation is used, not as a substitute for the use of one's own Testament, but for comparison and to bring the challenge of a new translation. This is followed by *Suggestions for Personal Study*. These are questions upon the Scripture, intended to lead the reader to discover the issue or situation in each reference and to find the big ideas for which Jesus stood. These Suggestions, in seven sections, can be used for daily study in the Morning Watch or followed in a study of the chapter at a single sitting if preferred.

The third section, *Questions for Group Discussion*, are intended for the guidance of the group or for personal use as a summary.

The first twenty-one chapters cover, in the order of the Matthew-Mark-Luke record, the major events in Jesus' life. The order given in Sharman, "Records of the Life of Jesus" and "Jesus in the Records," has been followed. Eight supplementary chapters cover other problems faced by Jesus at various times in his life and on which we seem to have a right to go to his life for help. Each chapter has also one central problem and is a unit in itself. Accordingly the book can be used for a series of topical or problem studies (see page ix for Topical Index), using the chapters in whatever order the problems and needs of the group may dictate, or as a systematic study of the life of Jesus from the problem approach.

To the Leader

The Questions for Group Discussion include many questions which have actually been used in discussion groups. They are arranged in the order in which they would be used in an actual group, though there are more questions than could be used in any one discussion. Each set will be found to contain: First, questions with which to open the discussion. These are usually concrete, out of the experience of the group, and intended to capture interest and to make living and vital the major problem for discussion. Second, there are questions on the biblical material, intended to lead the group members to examine for themselves each incident or story so as to understand the situation Jesus faced and to discover how he met it and what he stood for. These usually close with a summary question to gather up the thinking of the group and give a chance for the formulation of the *Big Idea* for which Jesus stood. Third, there are questions which have to do with action. These challenge the application of Jesus' ideal to various present-day problems. These are intended to lead to a consideration of the changes in life today which the adoption of Jesus' ideal would make necessary, whether these changes are practicable, and how they can be brought about. It will thus be seen that the questions are arranged in the order of rewarding individual or group thinking, namely, (1) Problem; (2) Solution; (3) Action.

The leader will not follow these questions mechanically. He will need to choose, revise, eliminate, add and thus make a list of his own, covering, however, questions for each of the three sections suggested above—namely, questions to make the PROBLEM understood; questions leading to a search for Jesus' SOLUTION; questions to make possible ACTION, the application of the solution of the problems which has been arrived at.

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CHAPTER I

What Do the People of the World Want?

A Study of the National Hopes in Jesus' Day

The hopes and longings of the world show forth on the pages of every morning's newspaper. During the Great War, victory and peace were the great desires. When the War was over, the nations of Europe began asking for enough to eat and wear, and longing for a return of prosperity. What do the peoples of the world most want today?

Jesus' nation had great national hopes. Though a subject people for six centuries, like the Poles, the Jews never lost their national consciousness nor their deep longing to be free. As you read these records of the beginning of Jesus' life, jot down the great hopes of the Jews as you find them here suggested.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Luke 1: 46-55.

46 Then Mary said:

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

47 *My spirit has joy in God my Saviour:*

48 *for he has considered the humiliation of his servant.*

From this time forth all generations will call me blessed,

49 *for He who is Mighty has done great things for me.*

His name is holy,

50 *his mercy is on generation after generation,*

for those who reverence him.

51 *He has done a deed of might with his arm,*

he has scattered the proud with their purposes,

52 *princes he has dethroned and the poor he has uplifted,*

53 *he has satisfied the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.*

54 *He has succoured his servant Israel,*

mindful of his mercy—

55 *as he promised our fathers,*

to have mercy on Abraham and his offspring for ever."

Luke 2: 27-32

27 When the parents of the child Jesus carried him in to perform the customary regulations of the law for him,
 28 then Symeon took him in his arms, blessed God, and said,
 29 "Now, Master, thou canst let thy servant go,
 and go in peace, as thou didst promise;
 30 for mine eyes *have seen thy saving power*
 31 which thou hast prepared *before the face of all the peoples,*
 32 *to be a light of revelation for the Gentiles*
 and a glory to thy people Israel."

Luke 2: 41-52

41 Every year his parents used to travel to Jerusalem at the
 42 passover festival; and when he was twelve years old they
 43 went up as usual to the festival. After spending the full
 number of days they came back, but the boy Jesus stayed
 behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know of this;
 44 they supposed he was in the caravan and travelled on for
 a day, searching for him among their kinsfolk and ac-
 45 quaintances. Then, as they failed to find him, they came
 46 back to Jerusalem in search of him. Three days later they
 found him in the temple, seated among the teachers, listen-
 47 ing to them and asking them questions, till all his hearers
 48 were amazed at the intelligence of his own answers. When
 his parents saw him they were astounded, and his mother
 said to him, "My son, why have you behaved like this to
 us? Here have your father and I been looking for you
 49 anxiously!" "Why did you look for me?" he said. "Did you
 50 not know I had to be at my Father's house?" But they
 51 did not understand what he said. Then he went down
 along with them to Nazaret, and did as they told him.
 52 His mother treasured up everything in her heart. And
 Jesus *increased* in wisdom and in stature, and *in favour*
 with God and man.

Matt. 3: 1, 2.

1 In those days John the Baptist came on the scene, preaching
 2 in the desert of Judaea, "Repent, the Reign of heaven is near."

Luke 3: 1-20.

1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar,
 when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea, Herod being
 tetrarch of Galilee, Philip his brother tetrarch of the country
 of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysias tetrarch of Abilene,
 2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas the word
 of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the desert;
 3 and he went into all the Jordan-district preaching a baptism

4 of repentance for the remission of sins—as it is written in the book of the sayings of the prophet Isaiah,

*The voice of one who cries in the desert,
‘Make the way ready for the Lord,
level the paths for him.*

5 *Every valley shall be filled up,
every hill and mound laid low,
the crooked made straight,
the rough roads smooth;*

6 *so shall all flesh see the saving power of God.’*

7 To the crowds who came out to get baptized by him John said, “You brood of vipers, who told you to flee from the

8 coming Wrath? Now, produce fruits that answer to your repentance, instead of beginning to say to yourselves, ‘We have a father in Abraham.’ I tell you, God can raise up

9 children for Abraham from these stones! The axe is lying all ready at the root of the trees; any tree that is not producing good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”

10 The crowds asked him, “Then what are we to do?” He

11 replied, “Let everyone who possesses two shirts share with him who has none, and let him who has food do like-
12 wise.” Taxgatherers also came to get baptized, and they

13 said to him, “Teacher, what are we to do?” He said to
14 them, “Never exact more than your fixed rate.” Soldiers also asked him, “And what are we to do?” He said to them, “Never extort money, never lay a false charge, but be content with your pay.”

15 Now as people’s expectations were roused and as every-
body thought to himself about John, “Can he be the Christ,”

16 John said to them all,

*“I baptize you with water,
but after me one who is mightier will come,
and I am not fit to untie the string of his sandals;
he will baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire.*

17 His winnowing-fan is in his hand to purge his thresh-
ing floor.

*to gather the wheat into his granary
and burn the straw with fire unquenchable.”*

18 Thus with many another appeal he spoke his message to
19 the people. But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved
by him for Herodias his brother’s wife as well as for all
20 the wickedness that he, Herod, had committed, crowned all
by shutting John up in prison.

Mark 1: 9-11.

9 Now it was in those days that Jesus arrived from Nazaret

10 in Galilee and got baptized in the Jordan by John. And the
 moment he rose from the water he saw the heavens cleft
 11 and the Spirit coming down upon him like a dove; then said
 a voice from heaven,
 'Thou art my Son, the Beloved,
 in thee is my delight.'

SUGGESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY¹

1. **Luke 1: 46-55.** What does Mary say the coming of Jesus will accomplish? What is our ambition for our nation?
2. **Luke 2: 27-32.** From this statement about Jesus, what would you think the people were expecting?
3. **Luke 2: 41-52.** Notice how loyal Joseph and Mary were to the national customs of the Jews. See verse 41.
4. **Matt. 3: 1, 2; Luke 3: 1-6.** The Jews believed that a deliverer, the Messiah, would come to make them free from the Roman power and set up the "Kingdom of God," in which there would be prosperity and righteousness and peace. When reading this passage, remember that the announcement "The Kingdom of God is here" brought the same thrill of hope in conquered Palestine as has the proclamation in subject European lands: "The autocracy is overthrown, a democracy is at hand."
5. **Luke 3: 7-14.** "Repent! Stop your graft; act square and fair." This is what John demanded. Where would this hit our country the hardest?
6. **Luke 3: 15-20.** The people here ask: "Is John really the Christ?" Why did they think he might be the Deliverer for whom they were looking?
7. **Mark 1: 9-11.** If you had been the carpenter Jesus, in the little village of Nazareth, and a traveler had come and reported with eager voice: "A man down on the Jordan says that the new kingdom we have been looking for is here; crowds are flocking to his standard," what would you have done?

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What are the big ambitions of our nation today? What do our leaders seem to hope she will become?
2. What were the great longings of the peoples of the world during the Great War? What things do the people of the world most want today?
3. Which nations represent the greatest tension and friction

¹ The Suggestions for Personal Study are divided into seven sections, so that they may be usable as a guide in daily Bible reading and study, as well as in the study of the chapter at one sitting.

points in the world today? What are the outstanding causes of this tension?

4. What were the causes of national tension and unrest among the Jews? Judging from this week's study (Sections 1 to 7, Suggestions for Personal Study), what would you say the Jews most wanted for their nation?

5. What hopes were aroused by John's ringing appeal: "Repent, the Kingdom of God is here"? Why did the crowds respond to John's challenge? Why did Jesus respond?

6. Compare the sources of tension and the hopes in the nations today with those in Jesus' day. In what regards are they the same; in what regards are they different?

7. Now that the War is over, what big jobs has the nation left to do? In their demands for sacrifice and devotion, how do they compare with the calls of war time?

8. What demands are coming upon our nation for help in world affairs? How much and what responsibility should she take in response to these calls?

CHAPTER II

What Should We Choose?

Jesus Faces His Mission for His Nation

A call from the nation always means decision: How best can I help? So Jesus, after deciding to leave his business as a carpenter and answer his nation's call, spent forty days in earnest thought and prayer deciding how best he could help his people and the world. This week's readings give three possible courses of action suggested to Jesus which he decided not to follow, and the fourth, which he chose. If we can sense the genuine struggles of Jesus' decision, perhaps it will help us in deciding when we come as individuals or a nation to forks in the road.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Matt. 4: 1-11.

- 1 Then Jesus was led into the desert by the Spirit to be
2 tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights
3 and afterwards felt hungry. So the tempter came up and
said to him, "If you are God's Son, tell these stones to be-
4. come loaves." He answered, "It is written,
*Man is not to live on bread alone,
but on every word that issues from the mouth of God.*"
- 5 Then the devil conveyed him to the holy city and, placing
6 him on the pinnacle of the temple, said to him, "If you are
God's Son, throw yourself down; for it is written,
*He will give his angels charge of you;
they will bear you on their hands,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.*"
- 7 Jesus said to him, "It is written again, *You shall not tempt*
8 *the Lord your God.*" Once more the devil conveyed him
to an exceedingly high mountain and showed him all the
9 realms of the world and their grandeur; he said, "I will
give you all that if you will fall down and worship me."
- 10 Then Jesus told him, "Begone, Satan! it is written, *You*
must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone."
- 11 At this the devil left him, and angels came up and min-
istered to him.

Luke 4: 16-21.

Then he came to Nazaret, where he had been brought up, and on the sabbath he entered the synagogue as was his custom. He stood up to read the lesson and was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah; on opening the book he came upon the place where it was written,

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me:
for he has consecrated me to preach the gospel to the poor,
he has sent me to proclaim release for captives and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set free the oppressed,*

to proclaim the Lord's year of favour.

Then, folding up the book, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him and he proceeded to tell them that "To-day, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

SUGGESTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

1. **Matt. 4: 1-4.** In reading about the first possible course of action suggested to Jesus, remember that the people of Palestine were bitterly poor and needy and that Jesus himself was hungry because of his long fast. Why do you think Jesus here refused to satisfy the hunger of himself and his people?

2. Read again **Matt. 4: 1-4.** What did Jesus mean by "Man shall not live by bread alone"? When laborers are well fed and clothed, why do they still strike? Why is not plenty to eat and wear enough for the individual or the nation?

3. **Matt. 4: 5-7.** In reading the account of the second possible course of action suggested to Jesus, keep in mind that many of the people expected this deliverer to come miraculously. Indeed, there was a popular belief that the Messiah would appear on the pinnacle of the temple and cast himself down unharmed. Why do you think Jesus refused to gather a following by playing to favor in this way?

4. Think again about the suggestion which came to Jesus that he gain a following by playing to popular favor. **Matt. 4: 5-7.** To what extent can an individual or a nation afford to follow the popular road? How does the election of political candidates today depend upon their playing to popular favor?

5. **Matt. 4: 8-11.** In reading about the third possible course of action suggested to Jesus, remember there was in Palestine a revolutionary party, known as the Zealots, who believed this deliverer would be a military commander, like Judas, the Hammerer, who could lead them in throwing off the hated Roman power. In your opinion, could Jesus have led a successful

military revolution? Why do you think Jesus refused to lead a revolution to free his people from the galling Roman yoke? What more than revolution is necessary to insure a "new day" for a nation?

6. Think again about Jesus' refusal to head up a military revolution. Why do revolutionists against tyranny so frequently practice equal tyranny when they come into power? How can we be sure that our nation and the other powers will use their strength for the good of the world?

7. **Luke 4: 16-21.** When Jesus told his own townspeople in the village synagogue what he had decided to do, he chose from the many possible prophecies a passage of the exile period, in which the prophet declares to the exiles in Babylon their approaching deliverance. Read this passage carefully in its historical setting, and state in present-day language just what you would say Jesus decided to do.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What would you say are the different possible courses of action men are asking our nation today to follow in world affairs? What are the reasons given for each?

2. Let us compare the three possible courses of action suggested to Jesus as ways to help his nation:

a. **Matt. 4: 1-4** (Sections 1, 2). The people of Palestine were poor and Jesus was hungry from his long fast. Why did Jesus refuse to satisfy the hunger of himself and his people? Why is not plenty to eat and wear enough for the individual and the nation?

b. **Matt. 4: 5-7** (Sections 3, 4). What in the popular expectation of the people made this a real issue? Why did Jesus refuse to gather a following by playing to popular favor? What are the dangers of a movement founded on popularity?

c. **Matt. 4: 8-11** (Sections 5, 6). How strong was the revolutionary party in Palestine? Could Jesus have led a successful military revolution? Why do you think he refused to lead a revolution to free his people from the galling Roman yoke?

3. In what regards do you think the choosing of either of these three ways would have been disastrous to Jesus' work for his nation?

4. Compare the possibilities suggested to Jesus as paths of action for his people with the possibilities that politicians are suggesting for our nation today. On the basis of Jesus' refusal, which of these choices suggested to our nation would you say that she should avoid?