Welcome back to week 7 of our overview of the Bible I’m calling From Garden to Glory. We have covered 8 of the 9 main eras of the Old Testament. Our remaining one is the Silent Era.

**Silence era:**
From the time of Malachi more than 400 years pass before the storyline of God is picked up again in the times of the New Testament. These 400 years have come to be referred to as the Silent Years or the time between the Testaments. It seems best to understand “silent” to mean that while God still moved among his faithful, inspiring and leading them, he didn’t inspire anyone to write additional writings to be included in the Bible. In fact, quite a bit happened during these centuries as God prepared his people for the coming of his Messiah. Needs and frustrations intensified. Expectations were raised. In the fullness of time, the Messiah would come and be recognized by those who had ears to hear and eyes to see.

Regionally at the close of the Old Testament, Jerusalem was ruled by Persia. Soon Alexander the Great conquered the Persians (333BC) and establishes Greek culture and language as a unifying force for that part of the world. Later Greece is conquered by Rome about a 70 years prior to the time of Jesus and the opening of the New Testament.

In Israel, during these 400 years between close of the OT and opening of NT, there are militant Jews who attempt to revolt against the foreign rule and make Jerusalem and the surrounding area an independent country. These include the Maccabees and the Zealots.

The Jewish Holiday Hanukkah has its roots in this era. Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the Jewish Temple made possible through a revolt led by the Judean rebel group called the Maccabees who liberated the temple from the Seleucids—who were a faction of the Greece Empire. According to Rabbinic tradition, the victorious Maccabees could only find a small jug of oil that had remained uncontaminated by virtue of a seal, and although it only contained enough oil to sustain the Menorah for one day, it miraculously lasted for eight days, by which time further oil could be acquired. You can read more about it in 1 Maccabees in the Apocrypha—which is a collection of historical writings during this time between the Testaments.
Religiously there are two primary groups—the Pharisees and the Sadducees. For the most part both are caught up promoting religious legalism and adherence to external rules to manage outward appearances verses promoting and inspiring real heart change toward God. Many were from the Levitical line of Priests from the Old Testament, but not all of them.

The Pharisees were “separatists.” In fact, the Hebrew word for Pharisee means “separate.” They kept themselves separate from all things “worldly.” To protect the Jewish people from compromise and sin, the Pharisees created extra rules as a fence around the Law so that people wouldn’t even come close to violating it. For example, the Law forbade boiling a young goat in its mothers’ milk (Ex. 23:19), so the rabbis declared that meat and dairy could not be consumed in a single meal. Later the Rabbis even required separate plates for meat and dairy. You can still see the remnants of these rules in the Kosher eating patterns of orthodox Jews.

The Sadducees were more liberal. They functioned more like wealthy politicians who used their money to keep the political and religious waters calm.

The Sanhedrin was a kind of leadership board made up of representative from the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The thing that really bonded these two different groups together was their passion for religious freedom…and of course that passion for religious freedom fed their antagonism toward Jesus because he made waves both religiously and politically by allowing the title Messiah and King to be used in association with his name.

Hopes for the “Messiah” or “Savior” of Israel prophesied in the Old Testament are kept burning fairly hot throughout this era of silence. Because of foreign domination and oppression, some longed for spiritual salvation, but most longed for political salvation. The Jewish people desperately longed for someone to come to bring deliverance and freedom. This sets the stage for Jesus to arrive on the scene with an attention-getting claim to be the Messiah.

As we did with the Old Testament, let’s get our bearings in the region where the New Testament Events take place. I’m not going to spend much time on this because most Bibles have maps you can consult.

Let me show you two maps we enhanced to highlight places highlighted in the NT. (If you want to get copies of these, you can get them at the end of my sermon manuscript for today on our www.cotf.org website.)

This first map is of Israel when the NT beings. Look at the Black labels first, they
point out the main provinces of Israel mentioned in the NT.

**Galilee**
Lying between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. Jesus considered this area home. 80% of Jesus life and ministry done here.

**Samaria**
Lying between Mediterranean Sea and Jordan River. Home to the Samaritans—part Jewish, part Gentile—they lived in constant animosity with the Jews.

**Judea**
Lying between the Mediterranean Sea and Dead Sea. Encompassing the city of Jerusalem, this area is home to most of the Jews in the New Testament.

**Perea**
Perea is long, narrow province on the east bank of the Jordan River. Jesus spent some concentrated time there with his disciples toward the end of his ministry.

Now look at the red labels- they mark the key cities mentioned in the NT.

**City of Nazareth**
Located just west of the Sea of Galilee, it is the town where Mary and Joseph lived, and in which Jesus grew up.

**City of Capernaum**
Located on the top of the Sea of Galilee, it is where Jesus called home during his Ministry years.

**City of Jerusalem**
Located in Judea, just off the northwest shoulder of the Dead Sea, it is the home of the temple, the holy city, and the center of activity for Jews.

**City of Bethlehem**
Just southwest of Jerusalem, it is the birthplace of Jesus.

As we move further into the NT the news of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection launches out from Jerusalem through the missionary journeys of Paul.

**Galatia**
Located in Modern-day Turkey, it was the destination of the apostle Paul’s 1st Missionary Journey.
Asia
Located on the western coast of modern Turkey, it was the destination of Paul’s 3rd missionary journey.

Greece
Located in modern Greece, it was the destination for Paul’s 2nd missionary journey.

Italy
This was the country of Paul’s final imprisonment and death.

Now the Red labels note the major cities

Jerusalem
Location of beginning of church as Holy Spirit fills Jewish believers.

Damascus
In same location as biblical times in Syria, it was Paul’s destination when he was temporarily blinded by Jesus and converted to Christianity. [See segment in The Bible Series]

Caesarea
The site of Paul’s trials and Peter’s encounter with Cornelius when Holy Spirit visibly fills Gentile believers. Think HEART because from here the Gospel is pumped into all the world.

Antioch
On Mediterranean coast north of Israel, near modern Turkey, it was the beginning point for all three of Paul’s missionary journeys.

Rome
In same location as in biblical times in Italy. It was the political and cultural heart of the Roman Empire. The city where Paul’s life comes to a close.

With the general lay of the land in the NT in view, let’s again get an overview of the flow of the NT as we did with the OT. First turn to your table of contents.

Do you remember:
How many books in the NT? 27
How many different authors? 9
Time span it covers? 60 years
Look at the books listed in the NT section of your table of contents.
There are 3 types of books in the NT just as we saw in the OT. History – first five books, Matthew – Acts  
Pauline Letters – written by Paul and often referred to as epistles from Greek epistolē = message, letter. Romans - Philemon  
General letters (Epistles)-written by other apostles or close associates. Hebrews-Revelation. 

Now, as we did with the historical books of the Old Testament, we can divide the NT into three main eras. Let’s get a framework for the NT flow in view this week and then next week we’ll zoom in and fill in more detail.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Era</th>
<th>Gospel</th>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Missions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Big Idea</td>
<td>Jesus comes in fulfillment of the OT prophecies of a savior and offers salvation and the true Kingdom of God. Some accept him, but many reject him. He is crucified, buried, and resurrected.</td>
<td>After the ascension of Jesus, God uses Peter to establish the church, God’s next major plan for humankind.</td>
<td>God uses Paul to expand the church into the Roman Empire during the next two decades.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Key Events</td>
<td>Filled in later in message</td>
<td>Filled in next week</td>
<td>Filled in next week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Figure</td>
<td>Jesus – Predicted Messiah</td>
<td>Peter – Leader of the Early Church</td>
<td>Paul – First Christian Missionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Location</td>
<td>Israel proper (Land of Canaan in OT, Palestine in NT)</td>
<td>City of Jerusalem</td>
<td>Roman Empire</td>
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Let’s begin to take a little closer look at the first NT Era of the Gospels, the four biographies of the life and ministry of Jesus.

While the Gospels are biographical, they are actually thematic portraits of Christ’s life that place very little emphasis on His early life and great emphasis on his last week of his life. While the Gospels tend to follow the chronology of Jesus’ life, there are exceptions, so don’t be thrown by that in your reading. It’s worth mentioning that when all four Gospels are harmonized, only about 50 days of Jesus’ active ministry are dealt with.
It is also important to know that not all the Gospels cover the same events in Jesus’ life. Think about the Gospels as 4 different eyewitness accounts of Jesus life and ministry. And each writer brings his background and perspective to his writing, and each brings his objective or purpose to what he writes. Because their writing is purpose driven, each of them emphasizes a little different aspect of the life and ministry of Jesus.

If you blindfolded 4 different people and put them on four different sides of an elephant and then asked them to describe the elephant for you, you will get different details and descriptions from each one but they are all describing the same animal. This is similar to what we get with the gospel writers who are all describing the same Jesus.

I think it is helpful to break down the Gospels into four main movements.

**Early Life: Childhood to baptism**
Early in two of the four Gospel accounts, we learn that the birth of Jesus is unique and supernatural. Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem of Judea. After a rushed trip to Egypt to protect Jesus from Herod’s newborn-extermination policy to rid the land of threats to his throne, Mary and Joseph head back to Nazareth and settle back into life. There, Jesus trains in a common trade of carpentry, which was probably not working with wood as much as with stone since there is way more rock in Israel than wood.

When Jesus is 30 years old, his cousin John the Baptist, is ministering and baptizing people in the Jordan River near the Dead Sea. After Jesus is baptized, a remarkable event takes place. God the father is heard speaking from heaven, saying, “This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” and the Holy Spirit, in the visible form of a dove, descends on Him. He is then led into the crucible of the desert wilderness where Satan messes with him for forty days. Satan makes every attempt to get Jesus to follow his plan rather than God’s plan. Jesus resists him by resting on and quoting Scripture and remains sinless, which serves to validate his readiness to make himself known as the Messiah.

As Jesus begins his ministry his message has a two-fold focus.

**Early Ministry: Initial Acceptance**
First, he is the predicted Messiah, or, as the word is translated in the New Testament, the Christ, and people need to believe in him. Second, he challenges the people to live a life of genuine righteousness, not simply managing appearances with external hypocrisy like the religious leaders.
Jesus validates his position as the Messiah and demonstrates his power to forgive sin by performing many different types of astounding miracles. And the signs of initial acceptance are encouraging. Much of this early activity takes place in the area of Galilee.

The initial acceptance and popularity Jesus experiences does not last.

**Later Ministry: Growing Rejection**
The longer Jesus teaches and the more widespread his popularity grows, the religious leaders become profoundly concerned. They are appalled at his messianic claims…They are offended at his confrontations…and they are fearful that his followers will gain the attention of the Roman governor and trigger religious oppression. To nip these issues in the bud, they try to discredit Jesus.

This growing rejection prompts Jesus to begin to focus more attention on the resistance he’s getting from the religious leaders. He warns them of their hypocritical posture and the resulting judgment that will come on them. At the same time Jesus begins spending more time with the Disciples who he is preparing to carry on without him. He also challenges the multitudes following him to count the costs of true discipleship. Again, this season of his ministry takes place in Galilee and his home base is Capernaum.

About three years into Jesus’ ministry the people become more and more polarized about Jesus, either following him enthusiastically or resenting him deeply.

**Death and Resurrection: Final Rejection**
As the time for Passover approaches, Jesus takes his disciples back to Jerusalem. The concern over Jesus begins to rise to new heights. The messianic claims Jesus is making, now more clearly than ever, are getting back to the religious leaders on a regular basis now. They are becoming more annoyed over his audacity and blasphemy. In addition, any disruption that Jesus or his followers might cause could prompt the Roman governor to shut down the temple.

With Passover a few days away, the religious leaders are finally able to stir up enough enthusiasm for Jesus’ crucifixion. They subject him to a series of mock trials on false charges. Then Jesus is crucified on Friday (Though some would argue it was on Thursday), buried that night, and rises again from the dead on Sunday, after being in the tomb three days.

**Conclusion:**
We have traversed another major chunk of God’s story today—the Silent Era giving way to the Gospel Era. It’s a defining moment in Israel’s story, a defining moment in
the World’s story, and therefore a defining moment in our story.

In the Silent era we get the sense that the pain of brokenness is deepening and the longing for a rescuer is increasing. The need for God’s intervention is long overdue. And as Paul writes in Galatians 4:4, when the time is perfect…God acts…he sends his Son Jesus to rescue people from their sin and brokenness…and to begin to journey with them in real relationship.

Again this is not just ancient history. This is not just the story of people in the centuries leading up to Jesus: it’s our story too. We all desperately need a Savior. We want life to be fulfilling, for things to work out, to be rescued from the pain and brokenness of our own lives.

We are designed to live forever, created with purpose, and created with yearnings for the eternal. We can’t be satisfied with a world in which civilizations rise and fall and nothing ultimately matters. We can never find peace deep in our souls while we are disconnected from God.

And if the story of Israel that we have covered to this point has taught us anything, it has taught us that God loves people. He created them to have relationship with him and from the time they fell into sin, he has set out to put a plan into place to save them from the consequences of their sin.

The Old Testament looked forward to the fulfillment of that plan. And the New Testament reveals that salvation from sin is way more than the plan of God…it’s the Person of God—the person of Jesus the Son of God.

He is supreme over all creation, yet he invites each one of us into relationship so that we can experience forgiveness and renewal from our sins and so that we can find the meaning and purpose for which we were created, both now and in eternity.

Are you connected with the Jesus of the Bible? Have you embraced his offer of forgiveness for sin and his leadership for your life?

The big idea of the Bible is emerging clearly: Meet Jesus, follow him, and be saved.