

## THE JOURNEYS OF JESUS

Another absorbing exercise is to piece together on the map the footsteps of Jesus during the three and a half years of his ministry. Again, there are books on this subject – one of the best is ‘An Atlas of the Life of Christ’ by John Stirling (try Google Book Search), which draws a line across the map to represent Jesus’ movements during each season of the year, with scriptural references. The main markers for the passage of the months are the official feasts, especially the Passovers in March/April, which every male Jew had to attend in Jerusalem.

This study reveals that most of the first year was spent in the south, in the area known as Judea, where Jesus was baptising his own disciples in the Jordan. The second year passed in Galilee, his home territory, with huge crowds following him as he travelled from village to village. At the climax he fed 5000 men with bread in the wilderness.

At the beginning of the third year the tide began to turn. People became disillusioned when he took no active part in politics, and refused to be made a king. Many of his followers turned away, and the hatred of the Scribes and Pharisees grew more virulent. In that summer Jesus led his disciples out of the country altogether, into Tyre and Sidon (present day Lebanon). He needed to escape from the pressures that were building up. On his return, he avoided Galilee and came down the east side of the Jordan valley to a region inhabited by Gentiles, where he fed the four thousand. From here Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee back to the western side, but meeting the hostile Pharisees on the beach, got straight back into the boat, and

sailed away north east to the top end of the Sea of Galilee, where he commenced a long trek up into the mountains. His disciples must have been puzzled and scared by his behaviour at this point. He seemed to be running away. His Father decided to intervene. On the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus was joined briefly by Moses and Elijah, brought back to life for a few hours to talk him through the dark days that lay ahead, and to strengthen his resolve. His spirits revived.

Through the last autumn Jesus re-visited the east of Jordan, travelling slowly south, and spending his last months in hiding, for there was now a price on his head. Finally, the last Passover loomed, and he came up to the capital city through Jericho, speaking in parables to avoid any statement that might be used against him. The last days passed in the Temple courts, where he openly condemned the hypocrisy of his enemies, whipping their hatred to fever pitch. Judas, one of the 12 Apostles, agreed to betray him.

Jesus saved the last night to talk to his Apostles, preparing them for the fact he was going to his Father. From now on, they would be on their own, and must support each other and learn from the Holy Spirit, the heavenly power he would send to teach them the will of God. Then he went out into the dark night, to face his persecutors, a mockery of a trial, and the agony and shame of a public crucifixion. But as all four writers concur, on the third day the astonished disciples found his tomb empty. Their Lord was alive from the dead.