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PREFACE

The Ministry of Christ was written to help students in their early teens make a historical study of the life and teachings of Christ and His apostles. The book originally appeared as a series of three books and is still available in this form. *The Ministry of Christ Throughout Palestine* begins with the events leading to the birth of Christ and traces His ministry to the time of the Passion Week and the work of the apostles in Jerusalem to the time of Stephen's death. *The Ministry of Christ to the Ends of the Earth* portrays the work of Christ through His apostles.

The chapters are grouped into sixteen parts, each with a central theme. The lessons are introduced by study questions which are intended to guide the student in his reading. The chapters do not attempt to retell the Bible passages; rather, they seek to point out the significance of the passages and explain difficult parts in them. Two sets of questions are to help the students learn the facts presented in the chapter and Bible passage. Optional questions requiring research and reflection are listed under the heading "For Further Study."

We are indebted to the Rev. Francis Breisch for writing the manuscript; to the members of the Elementary Bible Committee; John Borst, Sidney Dykstra, Barney Peterson, John P. Vanden Bosch, and Nicholas Yff for planning the book with the author and evaluating the manuscript and to George Benes for making the maps. The maps on pages 16-17, 162, and 286 are adapted by permission from maps copyrighted 1954 by the American Bible Society. Sets of four outline maps of Paul's missionary journeys can be purchased from Christian Schools International.

It is the hope of the author and publisher that *The Ministry of Christ* will help the student make a direct and diligent study of the Bible. May this study delight him and strengthen his devotion to his Lord.

INTRODUCTION

Study Questions

1. How do we know that the New Testament is the Word of God?
2. What is the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament?
3. How does the New Testament picture Christ?
4. How should we study the New Testament?

We are about to study the New Testament together. The New Testament is a very important book. It has influenced the lives of millions of people and changed the course of our Western civilization. A book as important as the New Testament deserves our careful attention. We must be certain that we understand it. Therefore, before we begin to study the New Testament itself, we must learn some important truths about it.

The New Testament Is the Word of God

Of all the truths we can learn about the New Testament, the truth that the New Testament is the Word of God is basic and the most important. When we say that the New Testament is God's Word, we mean that it is God's revelation. Revelation comes from the word "reveal." In the New Testament God reveals Himself to us.

The New Testament was written by men who were inspired by God. The word "inspired" literally means breathed in. God inspired men by breathing into their minds the thoughts He wanted them to write, and by guiding them so that they expressed His thoughts in the way He wanted them to be expressed.

We dare to make such statements about the New Testament because the New Testament itself claims to be inspired. Jesus promised the apostles that after His departure from them He would send them the Holy Spirit who would "guide [them] into all the truth" (John 16:13). Paul explains what effect the coming of the Spirit had upon the apostles. "But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual words" (I Cor. 2:12-13). Paul

claims that both the ideas he presents and the words he uses are given by the Spirit of God. And this applies to the other writers of the New Testament as well.

But how do we know that these claims of inspiration are true? There are many wonderful features about the Bible which ought to make us take its claims seriously. It gives all the glory to God, not to man. It shows us the only way of salvation. It has changed the lives of men and of nations. But the real reason why a Christian believes that the New Testament is the Word of God is "the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts" (Westminster Confession of Faith, chap. 1, sec. 5). God the Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts through the Scriptures. This assures us that the New Testament's claim to be the Word of God is true.

The New Testament Is Infallible

Since the New Testament is the inspired Word of God, it is infallible. That means that it is without error. There are no mistakes in the New Testament. It does not give us any false information about God. Nor does it make any mistakes when it talks about geography, history, or any other subject.

How can we be sure that there are no mistakes in the New Testament? We know that this is the case because it was inspired by God. God is the author of the New Testament, and God does not make any errors. Therefore we may be sure that the New Testament is infallible, simply because God is the author.

The fact that there are no mistakes in the New Testament does not mean that we have no problems in understanding it. Sometimes we are not sure how a passage should be interpreted. Sometimes we cannot understand how two passages which seem to disagree can both be true. Sometimes there is a question about the exact wording of the New Testament text. Christian scholars must constantly study the New Testament carefully and try to solve these problems. And they may approach this task with confidence because they know that the problems arise from the errors of men, not from errors in God's Word itself.

The New Testament Completes the Old Testament

The New Testament is the Word of God, but it is not the entire Word of God. In the Bible the New Testament follows the Old Testament. Together the two Testaments comprise the Word of God. They record the development of God's perfect plan for saving sinful men.

God devised His plan of redemption even before He created the heavens and the earth. He first revealed that plan to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden after the Fall. But He did not explain all the details of His plan; He told them only the most simple, basic facts.

God's first promise to save sinners was like a seed planted in the earth. It began to grow and develop. The Old Testament tells us about its growth. The New Testament pictures the full-grown plant of redemption.

Therefore, the New Testament completes the Old Testament. It is as if the Old Testament ends with the words, "To be continued." In the New Testament many Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled, many types become realities. The old saying is true:

"The New is in the Old concealed;
the Old is in the New revealed."

Christ Is the Center of the New Testament

The entire New Testament tells of Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, through whom God provided redemption. The Gospels tell of His earthly ministry. The Book of Acts portrays His ministry in His church through the Holy Spirit. The Epistles explain His ministry and repeat His teachings. The Book of Revelation tells of His complete victory over the forces of evil. The story of Jesus Christ is the center of the New Testament, and a study of the New Testament should bring us face to face with Him.

Christ Is the Servant of God

The Bible pictures the work of our Lord Jesus Christ in many ways. Jesus calls Himself the Bread of Life (John 6:35), the Good Shepherd (John 10:14), and the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). In the Heidelberg Catechism He is called "our chief Prophet and Teacher, . . . our only High Priest, . . . and our eternal King," and that is a true picture of the threefold work of Christ.

However, there is one idea which the Bible uses many times which includes all those we have mentioned. That is the idea of servant or minister. Both words refer to someone who does the work of another. The Bible pictures Jesus Christ as the servant of the Father.

Let us look at some of the statements in the Bible which show this. In the Old Testament there are several passages which speak of the Christ as a servant. The best known of these is Isaiah 53. It tells of the suffering and death of Christ, by which His people will be saved. In the introduction to that chapter (Isa. 52:13-15), God speaks of Christ as "my servant."

In the New Testament we find many statements which refer to Christ's work as that of a servant. Paul tells us that Christ took "the form of a servant" (Phil 2:7). Jesus said that He came, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister" (Mark 10:45). At another time He said, "I am come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38).

The ministry of Christ includes everything He did and continues to do as the servant of God. That is why we call this book *The Ministry of Christ*. That title emphasizes His life of service. It reminds us that He did not seek to please Himself, but His Heavenly Father. It reminds us that He was doing God's will when He provided perfect salvation for us, His people. Since Jesus is our Saviour, the study of His ministry should teach us that He has done everything necessary to make us children of God. Since Jesus is also our example, the study of His ministry should teach us how to give our lives in service for Him.

How to Study the New Testament

Before we begin our study of the New Testament, we ought to consider the manner in which we should study it. We may never forget that the Bible is the Word of God. Because the Bible is God's Word, our study of it must be marked by certain attitudes.

1. The Bible must be treated with respect. We must study it carefully and diligently, so that we understand it correctly.
2. No one can understand the Bible by himself. The Holy Spirit is the only one who can enable us to understand it. Therefore we should always begin our study of the Bible with a prayer to the Holy Spirit for guidance and wisdom.
3. The Bible is not a collection of the ideas of men of ancient times about God. It is the means by which God speaks to us now. Therefore, when we study it, we should always try to apply it to our lives.

Chapter Checkup

1. In what ways has God revealed Himself?
2. What is inspiration?
3. What does the Bible teach about its origin? II Tim. 3:16; II Peter 1:21; I Cor. 2:12-13.
4. What do we mean when we say that the Bible is infallible?
5. How can we be sure that the New Testament is infallible?

6. How is the New Testament related to the Old Testament?
7. What ideas does the Bible use to picture the work of Christ? Which idea includes all the others?
8. Give some verses from the Bible that prove that Christ came as a servant.
9. How should we study the New Testament?

For Further Study

1. If the Bible were wrong about some matters of history or geography, could we trust its teachings about salvation?
2. Can a man who does not believe in Jesus Christ understand the New Testament properly?
3. In what way was Christ a minister?