

Let's tell stories. You will use *The Story of My Life as Told by Jesus Christ* for the years 26, 27, 28, 29, and 30. We're now in the year 27. It is Saul of Tarsus; he has heard of John the Baptist. Even in his synagogue in Tarsus, there is laughter. There is interest in this raven-headed man who is insulting not only the Pharisees but the Sadducees. He listens because he hears of the coming of the Messiah, and in his mind, he sees an Alexander the Great storming through the nations of the world, conquering them in the name of the living God.

In the year 27, he does not hear anything about the man who has befriended and become, and is rumored to be a kin of John the Baptist. The matter of messiahs is so common. Every man, it seems, who has something new to consider, eventually calls himself the Messiah. But the prophet, a man in camel hair and eating locusts and honey and only preaching in the wilderness: *that* captivated the mind of everyone. The only thing he knows that happened in the years 26 and 27 is that the emperor left Campania, one of the hills of Rome, and came to Capri, taking up his rule from there, while a man named Sejanus ruled in his stead.

Now, at this very time, there is a 15-year-old boy who will one day be emperor. Fate alone will decide that because there is too much intrigue to guess who might be the survivors, but this we can know, that in 27 there was one thing going on that would continue on until the death of the emperor Tiberius, and that is intrigue. Intrigue, plots, banishment, and death. There is a woman named Agrippina. She is actually the third Agrippina, named after a friend of Julius Caesar and a friend of Augustus Caesar, and there is no better way to get in good with the emperor than to name one of your children after one of the friends of the emperor. What is happening now is that this particular Agrippina will soon be banished. She will be one of many who, in these next few years, 10 of them, one after another, will be dying mysteriously, sent away to places even till this day no one recognizes.

The year 27 is without note. Then comes the year 28, when John the Baptist is making a great deal of enemies all over Israel. They had stoned prophets previously to this, and one day very soon they will say if we lived in those ages, we would not have stoned any of those prophets. The year 27 comes. The year 28 comes. 27, 28... then 29 becomes remarkable in the Roman Empire, and everyone hears about it. Out of the intrigue of the palace and the intrigue going on in Capri, and the growing number of people who disappear there, and those who are seen being thrown off a thousand-foot cliff on Capri, and the sailors beneath, bashing their heads in while they drowned.

There's something else going on, and that is Sejanus, little by little, taking control of the centurion guards, gathering all of the guards, not scattered throughout the city of Rome, but all into one place, so that his commands can be carried out immediately. He is courting any woman who might turn out to be his privileged door to the emperor and to the reign. What he does not know is that plots have counterplots, and in the year 29, Tiberius announces mysteriously that he will be coming back to Rome and to the Senate. The rumor is that this man, who has already risen to be something very high in the ranks of the Roman ...he is the prefect, and rumor has it that he might even be adopted by Tiberius, which would put him number one to the throne upon the death of Tiberius.

Sejanus walks into the Senate. Tiberius is there. He begins with a few words of praise. Everyone is smiling. Sejanus feels very comfortable and very anticipatory. And then the words turn, and little by little, Tiberius lays one charge after another against Sejanus and then pronounces this man an enemy of the Roman Empire.

By nightfall, the year 29, there are children playing in the streets of Rome. They have a ball there, kicking around the streets. It will eventually be thrown into the river Tigris. The ball is a human head. It was once the head of Sejanus. Immediately, someone takes his place. His name is Macro, and Macro will serve two emperors and will, in turn, have the privilege of being known as the man who put two emperors to death.

There's something else that happens in A.D. 29. The man who rules over Galilee is one of the sons of Herod. His name is Herod Antipas. Every year, he must go to Rome to report to the emperor. So must all of the 104 people who head the 104 provinces of the empire. When he is there, he meets his niece, his half-sister as a child, a grown woman who herself has a daughter, and this is evil meeting of evil. And so entranced by so singular a mind as he would have, one that matches his own, he divorces his wife, an act he will later regret, for she is the daughter of Aretas IV, a man not to be trifled with, the man who rules over the area, including the land of Petra.

She comes home. Is this his bride? It is the year 29, and the raven-headed John the Baptist begins to denounce Herod in a way that only John the Baptist could, accusing him of incest, for a man is not supposed to marry his niece. Of all the sins upon which some royalty might be forgiven, the one thing that is loathsome even to the worst of the Romans is incest. But in this case, it's a niece. Not quite as bad as a sister or a brother, but the heart of Herodias...Herodias wants John the Baptist dead.

In the meantime, the young man in Tarsus is applying his trade as a tentmaker. He's now approximately 18 years old. He has a young sister, by the way, who will play a high role in the drama of the man Paul of Tarsus. Paul has his mind set on but one thing, and that is to go to live in Jerusalem and sit at the feet of Gamaliel. And Gamaliel is at this very moment making headway toward becoming the chief rabbi of all the Roman Empire and, in fact, of all the people of Israel.

John the Baptist is taken to a fortress out in the wilderness. Herod the Great built it along with one or two other fortresses where he could flee in case of an invasion. And this particular one is pronounced Machaerus. And that's where John is put in prison, and he waits for the judgment of Herod. One day at the banquet, Herod, and this will be talked about in every marketplace in the Roman Empire, Herod asked the young and beautiful Salome, daughter of Herodias, to dance, and she danced so beautifully, and he turned to the young girl and made an offer to her. Salome, who is offered anything up to half his kingdom, says, "the head of John the Baptist."

And so, John the Baptist dies in the 29th year of this century. Tiberius will read many things in the year 30 AD, but one of them will be a letter that comes every week from Pontius Pilate, in which

he will be told of the crucifixion of a prophet, a typical Israeli prophet. Not much happened that year.

In the Christian view, there is the coming of Pentecost. For Paul, there are plans for coming to Jerusalem to study at the feet of Gamaliel. Gamaliel's father has just died. That leaves Gamaliel the number one teacher of all Israel. His grandfather, who had lived to be a hundred years old, had passed on the teaching in the particular alcove of the over 150 archways that surround the four sides of the temple. Simon took over for a number of years, and now it was Gamaliel, but Gamaliel had already long been held in greater esteem than his father, for Gamaliel was that man who had the rare gift of following greatness with even greater greatness. In the eyes of the Israelis, no one was higher than Gamaliel, no greater privilege than to sit at the feet of this great man.

Now, Saul is 20 years old. He will want to go as soon as he possibly can because 22 is the age when you can sit under the Pharisees and begin training as a Pharisee or as a priest. The years pass. The year 32 has virtually no Roman news to it, but the year 33, though not mentioned in Acts, brought forth one of the great thunderclaps of that day. It all had to do with a very wealthy, well-loved, well-respected woman in the city of Rome. She fell under the sway of a Jewish professing prophet. She believed everything he said. She was swept away by all the things that he could do, all the things he could perform, and all the great wisdom that he presented to her, and in the meantime, he embezzled her money.

She also happened to be a very dear and close friend of Tiberius. Tiberius was a man who was often given to very quick decisions, a man who could make a decision and later live to regret it. So, on this particular day, when he heard what had happened to this woman, he signed a decree: All Jews must leave Rome immediately. Now this is the year A.D. 33, and our emperor has only four years left to live. Within a few hours, months, or perhaps a year or two, it became a half-hearted gesture, but in the year 33, it was no such thing. Whatever the emperor wants, the Roman people want. What the emperor is for, the people of the empire are for. And if there is something that the emperor is against, suddenly, all over the Roman Empire, Jews are being mistreated, hated, and cursed.

Now, what is so fascinating about this is that just two years earlier, a new governor procurator, call him a governor who is ruling over a very difficult province, the province of Egypt. This man is a blind Jewish hater. And the population of Alexander, the seaport city of Egypt, is one of the largest concentrations of Jews in all the world, perhaps even more than Galilee and certainly only less than Judea. A blind hater of the Jews. That man's conduct in the coming years will cost the lives of a great number of Jews. 400,000 Jews lived in the city of Alexandria, with a governor who despised them with every breath he had.

A.D. 33 is the year that Paul began moving to the city of Jerusalem. And so, at the age of 24, he leaves his home, leaves his father, leaves his mother, leaves his sister, who will one day come to Jerusalem and marry herself and have a child, a boy. Of his wealth, we know nothing. We only know that he has been given permission to live in the home of Andronicus and Andronicus's wife,

Junia. He makes his way down the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean Sea, retracing the ship's steps that he had when he first went at the age of 12 or 13 to the city of Jerusalem.

He has a particular desire on this occasion. He lands at Caesarea by the Sea. Once more, he sees the great Colossus of Apollos, the male god of fertility, etc. The beautiful city, its Hippodrome, its endless beauties and architecture, and now there has been added a great host of apartments just beside the ocean and just near the temple of Apollos. Herod was quite a man to be able to placate the Syrians in Antioch by giving them a great beautiful granite polished stone boulevard east and west, north and south, and colonnades on both sides because it was always the Syrians job, whether written or unwritten, that they would be keeping an eye on Israel, dating back to the time when one particular governor of Syria, when Judah was part of Syria itself, tried to liquidate the entire Jewish race.

And then Herod had built this city to Augustus Caesar and had also rebuilt the Jerusalem temple. The scaffolds are already there, the scaffolds are on each side of the temple, and men are still working. It is not finished. Paul stops in the synagogue and Caesarea by the Sea, never knowing that very sight will be the place in the year 65 when war will break out between Rome and Israel.

He goes the 60 miles, joining great crowds along the way. It's Passover time; it is the year 34. Paul decides that he wants to see the spectacular event that takes place early in the morning, the day before Passover. So, he arrives late at night, goes up to the Mount of Olives, and there he spends the night. What he's waiting to see is the coming of the sun out of the east. Its rays will bugle forth and touch the temple facade, the face of the temple with its many terraces building upward and high, and in the very last place, where there would be a door, was a curtain. And behind that curtain was the living God. And so, he slept. And the next morning, he was awakened by music, smiling at the thought of meeting his kinsman, and then a moment later discovering that the music he was hearing was not familiar to him, nor were the tunes.

They found that a great host of followers of a man named Jesus from the city of Nazareth had spent the night there or had come early in the morning to witness the great, unbelievable scene when sun and gold meet and the temple lights up like living golden fire, and people are shouting and crying and praising God. He has mingled emotions. He knows that these people are not like him, but he admires their praise, but only for a short time.

So, he makes his way down into the city, observes the Sabbath, and goes to his home. He will be living in the home of Andronicus and Junia. He will live underneath the staircase of this two-story, three-room house. On the first floor, there is a living room, a bedroom, a kitchen, and above it, a small bedroom. For the next few years, in fact, it's for the next four years. That is where he will live. That's where he will pray. That's where he will study. And it is from there that he will leave frequently to walk to that cloister where sits Gamaliel. And so, our young 26-year-old man goes to the temple, and there he has pre-arranged to sit at the feet of Gamaliel, but there's another alcove, another cloister right next to the other. It has been there ever since the days of Hillel. And the man who had taught there for so many years and had now been replaced by some of his disciples was

a man who lived during the days of Hillel; his name was Shammai. And Paul looks upon them, remembers, and smiles. Shammai's disciples were the disciples of “the binder”. Hillel's disciples were those who were disciples of the “looser”. Shammai had given forth and presented a Jewish teaching, so strict that virtually everyone knew only the most foolish, and the strictest and the coldest could possibly ever dream of living so strict a life.

It was at that time that Paul met a man he would know virtually his entire life. Tall, skinny, no cheekbones at all. A sad and narrow face with big black, worrisome eyes. Skinny all over and a man who was from the day he had become a Pharisee until the day that he died in Jerusalem waiting for the Messiah in August of 70 AD, stood a man whose name was Sinai, and we will wait to find out what the word Sinai really means in the Hebrew language for it is the Hebrew word for a particular plant.

So, Paul sat down at the feet of Gamaliel, taking notes, repeating every word that Gamaliel uttered, asking questions, hearing answers that he was not prepared for. There was one thing that really bothered him later on, and that was that he was quoted as having said a good word toward a particular cult or sect of the Jewish religion. How Paul hated those people. There were two kinds of people he hated especially. One was the Gentiles, and the other were these followers of the way. He met them on the streets. He watched them parading together, arm in arm, throughout the city early in the morning and throughout the day. One day, he decided to go over and see what was happening in a particular place behind the temple. Behind the temple was a courtyard. There was an intersection there. Colonnades were placed there out from the two sides, and they were made into a roof by these large, long, high stone columns. These columns were known as Solomon's porch, and so it was Paul of Tarsus one day...and we'll take up from there.