



# THE Masters PLAN

## ...a New Beginning

April 12 - 15, 1990

Jerusalem, 33 A.D.

Jesus Christ lived in a society which was becoming increasingly disgruntled with status quo living. There was a political restlessness, particularly among the Jews, as the Romans demanded a more intense allegiance to the Emperor than the Jews cared to give.

Furthermore, 1st century religious life had been preceded by a lengthy period of spiritual upheaval in which Jews and Gentiles alike had become cynical toward their respective religious traditions. The time was ripe for a deliverer - the promised Messiah who would save His people.

Jesus entered the scene with a simple message of love for "whosoever will." Given the socio/political climate of the day in which God chose to send Jesus it is not surprising that people from all levels of society

would respond to His message.

How wonderful that among Jesus' followers appeared a robust, impetuous fisherman named Peter. How marvelous that a Pharisee named Nicodemus would see his revelation of the Lord mature to an authentic faith in the course of Jesus' earthly ministry. How remarkable that Mary Magdalene, an immoral woman, would experience true love and ultimate cleansing through her relationship with Jesus.

That was the nature of the Gospel which Jesus preached and lived among people nearly 2,000 years ago. Nearly everyone - young and old, male and female, rich and poor - heard the Lord's message. But only to those who dared to obey Jesus' call to follow Him was there extended the opportunity for relationship with the Savior of the world!

Nicodemus ("conqueror of the people" in Greek) was Jesus' link with the Jewish intelligentsia. He was a Pharisee, which gave him a position on the prestigious Jewish Sanhedrin council. His first encounter with Jesus took place "by night," indicating that Nicodemus was initially unwilling to be associated publicly with Jesus (John 3:2). Later (John 7:50-51), Nicodemus spoke in defense of Jesus to the chief priests and Pharisees who wanted to seize Jesus and bring Him to trial. "Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" asked Nicodemus. Then finally, as Nicodemus' faith in Jesus apparently solidified, the man who at first encountered Jesus "by night" risked his position and reputation by joining Joseph of Arimathea in the anointing of the Lord's body with spices before burial. In reaching Nicodemus Jesus showed the relevancy of His message for all people, even those in the upper echelons of society.

Peter ("the rock" in Greek) was a fisherman by trade. Though no doubt rough and tough, Peter showed a remarkable sensitivity to Jesus, perhaps demonstrated most poignantly in his willingness to discard his nets (his career!) to follow Jesus. Although somewhat impulsive and at times an embarrassment to Jesus, Peter soon won the Lord's affection and became one of the Master's closest confidants. Peter's constant presence at the side of Jesus undoubtedly facilitated the Lord's ministry to the working class people of the day. Soon after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, it was Peter who was used mightily by the Spirit to establish the Church in Jerusalem. Through the preaching of one sermon Peter saw three thousand people come to Christ (Acts 2:14-41)!

Mary Magdalene (a Galilean from the town of Magdala) was a most unlikely person for Jesus to associate with. Not only was she a woman, but her questionable reputation marked her as the kind of person whom Jesus seemingly should have avoided at all costs. Yet, the Lord chose to minister wholeness to her (Luke 8:2), casting out "seven demons" and establishing her as one of His closest friends. Although Jesus' own reputation had been tarnished through His friendship with Mary Magdalene and others like her (Matthew 11:19), she represented a link between Jesus and still another segment of society who needed the Gospel, the "down and outers." It was very appropriate that Mary, "of whom much had been forgiven," became the very first person to witness the empty tomb of Jesus (John 20:1).

