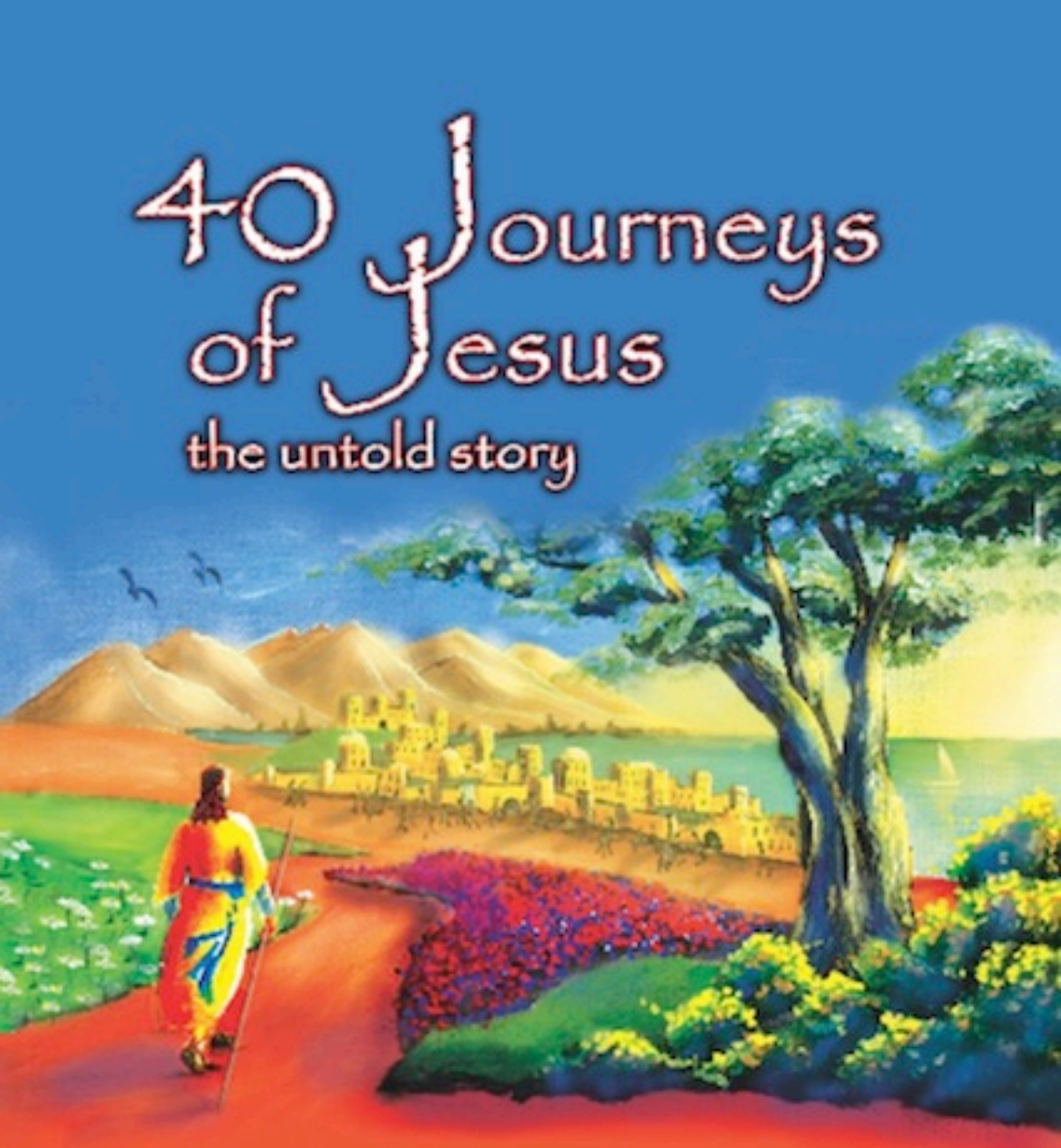



40 Journeys of Jesus

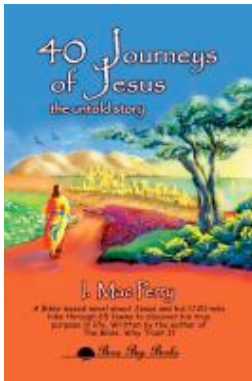
the untold story



I. Mac Perry

A Bible-based novel about Jesus and his 1720-mile hike through 65 towns to discover his true purpose in life. Written by the author of *The Bible: Why Trust It*

 *Boca Bay Books*



37 years in the making, this long-term research project has finally come to an end. Biblical historian I. Mac Perry has written an epic novel of the untold story of the 40 Journeys of Jesus, the gospel like you've never heard it before.

40 Journeys of Jesus

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40 --- **Journeys of Jesus** --- **The Untold Story**

A historical novel by I. Mac Perry



Journey One

Lower Jordan Valley

(January)

*Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to
Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.*

. Matthew 3:13

The narrow donkey trail east out of Nazareth cuts through the cap of the rise and traces a ridge dividing the rhythmic hills of lower Galilee on the left and the vast Esdraelon Plain on the right. In the plain there are millet and wheat and barley in freshly planted blocks of dark soil glistening with dew, and beyond, the swollen hills of Samaria glow in the brilliance of the morning.

On the ridge, Jesus moves steadily yet curious about why he feels so strongly motivated to see John the Baptizer". Damp pads of sand squeak and fling from his sandals and plunge back to the earth in little bombardments.

The path directs him to a broader trail. By mid-morning, he is in full view of Mount Tabor, a conspicuous mound of earth, green and tan in the shadow of its girth, alone and eminent and protruding fifteen hundred feet above the plain from its foot. Emerging from the land like a swollen gall, Tabor stands halfway between Nazareth and the Jordan River.

Jesus paces on and arrives at the base of Tabor. In his excitement to see the twisting Jordan River whose shallow gullet will direct him to John, he is drawn to climb up and over Tabor rather

than around it. The path forks from the main trail and winds like a mountain stream up the side of the hill. Lush, verdant foliage steeped with guttation closes in and the air becomes crisp and moist and cold. Jesus' robe, dank and heavy, is caught by every passing briar. Overhead, age-old oaks display twisting boughs.

Halfway up the hill, Jesus stops for his first rest since leaving home. He comes to a grove of pistachio trees where a narrow brook scurries and weaves a lacy trim over the terrain. The small, multi-branched trees have showered the ground with a volley of aromatic nuts expecting to perpetuate their stand at least another half century. Jesus gathers several nuts then leans over for a long, cold drink from the brook. He stretches upon a patch of greenery and bites into the round, flat chunk of honey bread his mother placed in his girdle.

Suddenly, as though time and sound momentarily cease, Jesus' senses become acutely receptive. The taste buds on his tongue record the flavor of each of the ingredients in the bread. The limestone soil beneath him seems to whisper its age, and the myrtles and the hollies sheltering the underbrush become vividly pronounced. The woods are alive with meaningful creations of his Father's world – wild goats, deer, red partridges, panthers, wild boars, all living in harmony. Jesus sees them and they are undisturbed by his presence. It seems to Jesus that he is seeing the land and all of its botanical lacing for the first time. *What does all this mean?* he thinks.

Never has Jesus felt such a keen sense of existence. It is as though a miraculous force has spanned space and time to remove a cloud that had dulled his senses. Puzzled at this sensitivity, Jesus stands. He feels the vibrations of each of the tiny dust particles with which his body and all of nature around him is formed. He perceives his body is a product of nature and is perfectly designed to blend with his environment. He is aware of life, more than he has ever

been, but he is puzzled and wonders if it has anything to do with his unquenchable desire to visit the Baptizer. Intrigue grows within him.

At the thought of John, the coaxing returns. A spirit of urgency sets his feet in motion once more. The ancient mound of Tabor beckons and calls from its peak. Jesus has never actually climbed Tabor but now like a magnet it draws him, pulling him upward. He moves up the ancient path.

Soon Jesus greets the summit, a flat oval plain of rich soil upon which stands the ruins of an old stone fortress, venerable and conspicuous with tall towers, bordering walls and roof. Skirting the fortress, Jesus hikes the crest to a point where he sees the plateau running north from Tabor and parallel to the Sea of Galilee. He stares across these northern hills to the distant, snow-capped Mount Hermon. Jesus has never visited the snow country either but now strangely feels he may soon.

Turning slowly to the west he barely sees the silver surface of the Great Sea a day's walk away and the tiny projection of Mount Carmel set against it. Between Mount Carmel and the rim of Tabor the mid-winter sun dries the spacious Plain of Esdraelon where in a few months' large fields of barley and other grains, bordered by armies of yellow and white daisies will roll like the waves of the sea from the winds that slide down the surrounding hills. Jesus is puzzled why in his mind's eye he can see all of these things. He had never paid much attention to them before. It is as if his eyes are open for the first time.

Jesus turns back to Mount Hermon, whose frozen waters in the spring will melt and flow into the narrow gully at its base. He follows the line of the gully to Lake Merom and farther down to the Sea of Galilee. At the south end of the sea the gully exits and widens and weaves through the Jordan Valley. "The Jordan River", he utters. His heart quickens.

Jesus stares at the tiny river as it winds through the dense foliage to the Salt Sea far below. Just north of the Salt Sea at the lowest end of the valley is the vicinity in which the traveler-convert had said John was preaching. Jesus strains his eyes but the distance is too great. He barely sees the sea and guesses at the area inhabited by the wilderness preacher. Yet the sight of the sea inspires him and quickens his determination. He is glad he made the climb. He feels satisfied and resolved.

Jesus surges down the side of Tabor like Deborah and Barak and the ten thousand Israelite soldiers who marched one morning a millennium ago down its slopes and onto the plain of Esdraelon to defeat the army of Sisera. With his newly acquired perception Jesus vividly sees those brave and anxious young warriors. He descends and heads southeast toward Scythopolis.

In Scythopolis, Jesus finds rest. It is his first night of peaceful sleep in a week, yet his body does not seem weak or drained. Just above the town is a ford where the road crosses the Jordan River.

At sun-up, Jesus crosses the ford. He climbs the high ridge and heads south through the province of Perea. On the morning of the third day, he arrives at the site where John is preaching.

Jesus descends the ridge above the river town of Bethabara and is now in the Jordan Valley very close to where John preaches. Though it is still winter, the air is warmer, thicker, and the underbrush dense at the river's edge in this sub-tropical region.

Jesus approaches the knoll of a four-foot bank, the last one at the border of the Jordan River where just a shout away in a clearing a large crowd has gathered. Looking upon the company of men, some standing close to the bank others crouched at the base of massive sycamore figs punctuating the muddy shoreline, Jesus quickly surveys the crowd and the heavy-bearded mass of a man standing at the water's edge. The man's arms are lifted and his hair hangs

straight and long below his waist. A rugged, tan robe of camel skin falls from his shoulders bound by a leather girdle at his waist.

“The Baptizer” he utters enthusiastically.

Jesus slips down to the base of the bank. Fallen oak leaves crunch against the soft gray sand beneath his sandals and lightly accent the distant clatter of crisp, dried palm fronds clanging in the breeze. Nearby, a tall cluster of bamboo adds a rustle to nature’s orchestra. Within these crescendos and diminuendos, the voice of the soloist, the Baptizer, roars into the crowd and beyond the crowd, muting into the heavy greenery encircling this theatrical setting.

“You!” the Baptizer bellows. “You no longer need periodic washings to remain virtuous. You do not need the temple or animal sacrifice, or priests or kings. All you need is one baptism and you will be made whole.”

Movement up on the opposite ridge draws Jesus’ attention. Four Roman soldiers on horseback stare down at the crowd. They listen to the words of John then ride away.

“You think you can escape the lives you have created for yourselves?” John roars. “How dare you. The ax of God’s judgment is prepared to chop you down if you are not fruitful to God’s kingdom.”

A question flies out of the crowd, “Are you the promised Messiah we have all been waiting for?” All heads turn to John.

John responds loudly, “There comes one mightier than I. The best I can do is immerse you in water as a sign of cleansing. The Messiah will immerse you in the Spirit of God, a dampness that will not dry in the sun but will glisten with absolute radiance of purity.”

Jesus’ heartbeat quickens.

John gives his invitation for immersion and several men step into the water, a sign of submission to John’s cause. Jesus moves in for a closer look. Suddenly, he stops. The crunch ceases, the wind

subsides. The fronds hang still. The Baptizer sees him. He seems to recognize him. He lowers his voice. His lips move but Jesus does not hear his words. A shining, clear cloud rolls across the sky and hovers over the scene. The Heavens appear to undulate with the soft harmony of a thousand angels.

Once again that strong feeling of coaxing swells within Jesus. He is mysteriously compelled to enter the water. In his mind he resists. He did not come to be baptized, but to hear John's message and to talk with him. Yet the nudging force engulfs him. His reasoning powers are numbed by an awakening spirit deep within.

John stands motionless, waiting a statue in the water, his eyes set on Jesus. Jesus steps into the water and stands before John. The crowd is silent, wide eyed. They are not sure what has happened to the wind and the sky. They feel something very extraordinary is about to take place. They seem afraid.

The waters of the Jordan are cold; they zigzag down from a wintry Sea of Galilee some seventy miles upstream. A warm flush spills from Jesus' heart and races through his chilled legs. He wants to speak to John, but the awakened spirit seals his lips.

John seems reluctant and softly says, "You should be baptizing me."

Words then spill from Jesus as if he had not formed them, "It must be done to fulfill all righteousness."

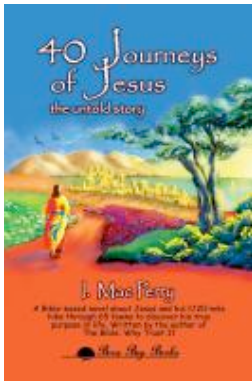
John nods and cradles Jesus in his arms. Slowly and obediently he begins to lower Jesus into the water. Jesus folds his arms and utters softly, "Father," as the waters engulf him and for a brief moment he is absent from the world. As Jesus emerges, a translucent veil appears to flutter about his shoulders like a large white dove. The brilliant cloud above divides and a mellow, perennial voice is heard, "*THIS IS MY BELOVED SON. IN HIM I AM WELL PLEASED.*"

40 Journeys of Jesus

“Did you hear that?” someone mutters. The crowd falls back. Another says, “Who spoke those words? It seemed to come from over that ridge.”

Some in the crowd point. Some shove. Some get out of the water. Some faint. A gentle, cleansing rain begins to fall upon the scene.

The crowd looks back and Jesus is gone.



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