

Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff Study Guide

**Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff by Christopher
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Contents

Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Part I: The Boy, Chapter 1 - 2.....	4
Part I: The Boy, Chapter 3.....	6
Part I: The Boy, Chapter 4.....	8
Part I: The Boy, Chapter 5 - 6.....	10
Part I: The Boy, Chapter 7 - 8.....	12
Part II: Change, Chapter 9 - 10.....	14
Part II: Change, Chapter 11 - 15.....	16
Part III: Compassion, Chapter 16 - 19.....	19
Part IV: Spirit, Chapter 20 - 22.....	22
Part V: Lamb, Chapter 23 - 24.....	25
Part V: Lamb, Chapter 25 - 26.....	27
Part V: Lamb, Chapter 27 - 29.....	29
Part VI: Passion, Chapter 30 - 35.....	32
Characters.....	35
Objects/Places.....	39
Themes.....	41
Style.....	44
Quotes.....	47
Topics for Discussion.....	51

Plot Summary

Heaven assigns the task to raise Biff, a childhood friend of Jesus Christ, from the dead to an angel named Raziel. Under Raziel's supervision, Biff must write his gospel to explain what Jesus, whose Hebrew name is Joshua, did before he started preaching. Biff's Hebrew name is Levi. Both the angel and Biff find the modern world confusing and frightening, but they both like pizza that they order from room service in their hotel. They share a single room and seldom leave. The man who delivers the pizza is ironically named Jesus.

Biff writes about his childhood experiences with Joshua and how Joshua does not know how to be the Messiah. All he can do at this stage is to resurrect lizards and people for a few moments. A rabbi suggests that the Magi who had visited during his birth may be able to help. Biff accompanies Joshua on his quest to visit the three Magi named Balthesar, Gaspar and Melchior. Balthesar, from his fortress near the town of Kabul in Persia, teaches Joshua ancient Chinese wisdom. Gaspar brings Joshua to the level of total Buddhist enlightenment, and Melchior directs the Messiah in the ways of doing miracles, such as multiplying food. Biff learns kung fu and how to make explosives. He also enjoys quite a few sexual adventures, but Joshua cannot partake due to his status as the Son of God.

The journey also involves high adventure. Biff releases a demon in Balthesar's fortress that ends the very old man's life. Joshua is the only man on earth who can put the demon where he belongs, and he does so just in the nick of time. He meets an abominable snowman in the mountains near Gaspar's monastery and becomes friends with the almost human beast. Biff and Joshua break up a celebration to Kali in India and save the lives of many Untouchable children.

The two boyhood friends, now young men, return to Israel, where Joshua begins his ministry. He preaches to the multitudes, heals the sick, transforms water into wine, walks on water and multiplies food. He soon develops a following, including those who had followed John the Baptist before Herod had John beheaded. Maggie (Mary Magdalene) tricks her husband into divorcing her and joins with Joshua and Biff. The Pharisees put Joshua through several inquisitions to prove him a blasphemer, but none of this affects Joshua until he goes to Jerusalem for Passover.

While at the Temple in Jerusalem, Joshua loses his temper and overturns the moneychangers' tables. This leads to his trial and crucifixion. Biff, losing control at Joshua's death, chases down Judas and murders him. He then steps off a cliff and commits suicide.

After Biff finishes his gospel, the angel releases him from the hotel room. Maggie, Biff's one true love, has been writing her own gospel with another angel in the hotel room across from Biff. Maggie and Biff walk arm-in-arm away from the angels to live their bonus lives together.

Part I: The Boy, Chapter 1 - 2

Part I: The Boy, Chapter 1 - 2 Summary

Heaven assigns the task to raise Biff, a childhood friend of Jesus Christ, from the dead to an angel named Raziel. Under Raziel's supervision, Biff must write his gospel to explain what Jesus, whose Hebrew name is Joshua, did before he started preaching. Biff's Hebrew name is Levi. Both the angel and Biff find the modern world confusing and frightening, but they both like pizza that they order from room service in their hotel. They share a single room and seldom leave. The man who delivers the pizza is ironically named Jesus.

Biff writes about how Joshua knew how to raise small animals from the dead as a child. They grow up together in Nazareth under Roman rule. The Jews tend grape vines and olive trees in the hills around town and plant grains in the valleys, along with herding herd sheep and goats. While the other children play the usual games, Biff and Joshua pretend to be rabbis or characters from the Bible. Biff realizes that Joshua is different when they first meet. While everyone else fears God and Rome, Joshua fears nothing.

The trouble with their childhood playing is that Biff develops a sense of satire, while Joshua wants to play true to the Bible stories. With Biff as Pharaoh and Joshua as Moses, Biff wants to let Moses' people go too early. He also plays Lot too politely.

Mary, Joshua's mother, talks too much about her son, the Son of God, and his virgin birth. The other townspeople worry that she will attract attention from the Philistines, who may put her on trial for blasphemy and stone her to death. They think her a bit insane, and the fact that she has other children beside Joshua reduces her credibility. Biff works his satirical humor about how he lusts after Joshua's mother, which earns Biff a punch in the nose from Joshua.

Joseph, supposedly the father of Joshua, fears this son. Joshua does not let Joseph forget who Joshua's real father is—Jehovah. Biff notices Joseph's discomfort and tries to help, and Joseph asks him to teach Joshua how to be human.

Unintended miracles happen around the young Joshua. His face appears on flat bread baked for Passover all over town when he is nine-years-old, which encourages Mary's bragging of her son's special status with God but also might bring the Pharisees' wrath. Mary cuts his hair and starts a rumor that the face on the bread is really young Moses.

In another miracle incident, a huge cobra follows Joshua everywhere he goes. While running around the corner of a building, Joshua, with the snake ten feet behind, collides with Jakan, a gang leader of older boys, and knocks him down. Jakan threatens to humiliate Joshua, but then the cobra comes around the corner and scares the bully. He starts shouting that Joshua consorts with demons, Jakan being the son of a ranking Pharisee and accustomed to the religious harangue. Just then, Mary Magdalene comes

out of her father's blacksmith shop. She argues that the cobra is just a snake, and to prove no demon possesses it, she holds her hand to the snake's raised head. The cobra backs off and spreads its cowl, but then just flicks its tongue against her fingers, the way snakes detect smell. She runs back into the house after Jakan and his gang leave and hollers her name back to Joshua and Biff upon their asking. She prefers to be called Maggie. Both boys feel strongly attracted to her.

Part I: The Boy, Chapter 1 - 2 Analysis

The author reveals actual historian speculations about Jesus Christ's childhood—he has siblings and some powers that he does not understand or control very well. Other speculations arise from the historical perspective of the Jewish people living over 2,000 years ago in Galilee, such as how the townspeople gossip among themselves and how the children play together.

In both an opening poem and afterword section, Christopher Moore explains his purposes in writing this irreverent and fictional account of the first 30 years of Jesus' life. He does not expect many conservative Christians to be in his audience, but he has also strived to be as accurate as possible. However, the thin historical documentation forces him to guess as best he can.

Heaven gives Biff the gift of tongues, a little bit of magic that allows the character to write in modern American English idioms. The author exploits this to create humorous passages, especially in dialog.

The miracle of the bread serves no other purpose than to frame a joke, but the snake miracle introduces two characters, one of very high importance—Mary Magdalene, or Maggie. The bully Jakan is a lesser character who reappears later on. Maggie captures both boys' hearts and through a strong foreshadowing statement, the author indicates that she feels more deeply for Joshua than Biff.

Part I: The Boy, Chapter 3

Part I: The Boy, Chapter 3 Summary

Modern Biff discovers a Bible in the hotel room, but he knows that Raziel will forbid him to read it because Biff had asked about what happened to his friends and Maggie after his death, and the angel refused to tell. Biff must figure out a way of making the angel leave the room so he can take the Bible out of the drawer and hide it in the bathroom, a facility for which the angel has no need.

Ancient Biff walks with Joshua and Maggie to a funeral. They talk about what Joshua and Biff plan to do as men. They are ten years old and ready to start their apprenticeships. The customary path is for sons to learn their fathers' trades, carpentry in Joshua's case and stonecutting in Biff's. Maggie declares that she would like to be a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee, to which Joshua says that he could make her a fisher of men. Maggie does not understand what he means. Biff jokes about becoming a professional mourner and bids Maggie adieu.

The boys spot a Roman centurion at the funeral and a Sadducee priest. Joshua says that the priest only cares about himself and decides to try raising the dead woman at the funeral. Through great effort, he manages to make the corpse sit up, much to everyone's horror. She takes a few steps toward her terrorized son. Biff waves Maggie over to drag Joshua away, and the woman falls properly dead.

The centurion talks with the three children and introduces himself as Gaius Justus Gallicus. Biff's humor charms him, but then Joshua calls out about the Romans harming Jews who follow their God. Gaius tells him that Rome has only two rules: pay your taxes and don't rebel.

The next day, Joshua prays in an olive grove seeking answers to his many questions. Biff comes along and talks to him about the effect the attempted resurrection has on the townspeople. The angel Raziel shows up to announce the coming of Christ ten years too late. A card game with the archangel Michael had made him lose track of time, Raziel abashedly claims. He then leaves after making Biff promise to tell any shepherds he might come across ten years ago about the good news. Biff gladly accepts the impossible task.

Biff hangs around the central well in the hope that he will see Maggie there, but she never shows up. Disappointment causes Biff to cry, which in turn causes Bartholomew, the town idiot, to ask why he cries. Bart, as Biff likes to call him, turns out to be smarter than he looks. He advises Biff to stop thinking too much and become a Cynic, which is what Bart is, along with being a Greek. Bart has nothing and thereby has no cares in the world, and nobody cares about him because of his stench and crazy behavior.

Biff realizes that Bart hides deep wisdom beneath his act as the town idiot. The idea of having no worries attracts Biff, but he decides that the life of a Cynic would not work out for him. He leaves Bart to join Joshua at the temple.

Part I: The Boy, Chapter 3 Analysis

A subplot develops with the modern Biff. He knows nothing of how Christianity developed after his death and is curious how things turned out. The Bible in the motel room becomes an object that he must obtain, but the angel stands in his way. However, judging by Raziel's behavior in ancient times when he comes ten years too late to announce the birth of Joshua, Biff may have the advantage of higher intelligence.

The raising of the dead human miracle begins with Joshua's effort to force the issue. He tries mightily to use his willpower and does succeed in scaring everybody at the funeral, but the idea is to demonstrate his deity through miracles besides reviving dead lizards, charming snakes or putting his image on flatbread like an ancient advertisement. In a modern term, Joshua needs to generate buzz. This scene also introduces the Roman centurion, Gaius Justus Gallicus, who plays supporting roles later on.

A love triangle emerges among Maggie, Joshua and Biff. Joshua may not be allowed to take a wife or have sex with a woman, but Biff has no such restrictions. He becomes jealous of Joshua because Maggie likes Joshua better, and Biff cries at the central well about what seems a hopeless situation. How can a human compete with the Son of God? There Biff discovers that Bartholomew is actual a Greek philosopher and not simply the town idiot, which is actually how ancient Cynics behaved—they neglected personal hygiene, rejected family and stopped chasing after money. The behavior appears idiotic but has a deeper purpose, and that is to achieve happiness through pure virtue.

Bert likes dogs and seems to be able to communicate with them. The historical tongue-in-cheek joke about this is that Diogenese (~412 - 323 BC) took on the symbol of the dog for himself, due to living like a dog and being called doggish. The terms Cynic and Cynical derive from the Greek words for dog and doggish. Biff offhandedly mentions that Bartholomew will become the first of Joshua's disciples. This parallels Diogenese's searching for an honest man with his torch or lantern. Bart the Cynic will find the one honest man in the world—Joshua, also known as Jesus Christ after his death.

Part I: The Boy, Chapter 4

Part I: The Boy, Chapter 4 Summary

Modern Biff tries to tip room service with a dime, an honest mistake because while in the area of Jerusalem, Raziel led Biff to a stash of ancient silver dinars that are worth thousands of dollars today and resemble modern dimes. The sale of the dinars finance the hotel room, pizzas and any other material items or services that Biff and the angel may need. Meanwhile, the angel becomes hooked on daytime soap operas. Biff uses this to convince Raziel to go out and buy a copy of Soap Opera Digest. The scheme does not immediately work.

Ancient Biff convinces Joshua that stonecutting offers more employment in the desert than carpentry because wood is scarce and rocks are common. They walk toward Sepphoris where Biff's father will take them both on as apprentices.

Joshua talks about his errors while trying to raise the dead woman at the funeral, and Biff talks about more earthly concerns like stepping into camel dung, the two monologs intertwining. They arrive at Sepphoris, a bustling Roman community and fortress. They spy a statue of Venus at the gate. Joshua calls it sinful and wonders why the Jewish people have not torn it down. Biff says that Zealots, rebellious Jews who act at night and in secret while working normal jobs during the daytime, had tried this and were all crucified.

While talking with his father, Biff says that he hates the Romans. The centurion Justus Gallicus overhears and refers to a Roman slave who once rebelled, won against two Roman armies but was eventually defeated and crucified. Satisfied that he had properly impressed the boys, Justus departs on his other duties. Biff and Joshua start cutting stone, and Biff lets a few sarcastic statements out about how great the work is. Joshua does not understand, so Biff tries to explain how sarcasm, a form of humor he claims to have invented and Bartholomew named, works. Joshua still does not understand.

Biff's father talks with the Greek who has hired him to build the house where the stonecutting takes place. The Greek wants a statue of a well-endowed nude Apollo set in place, but the floor is not yet finished. This angers the Greek and he orders Biff and Joshua to help move the statue. The Greek threatens the boys with a whip, but before he can strike, Justus knocks him down from behind and maintains Roman order while humiliating the Greek for trying to whip young boys.

Part I: The Boy, Chapter 4 Analysis

Joshua realizes what he had done wrong at the funeral. The power to raise people from the dead lies with God, his father, not Joshua's own willpower. In addition, the purpose was wrong, an attempt to gain recognition for his abilities too early. This indicates that Joshua has much to learn before he can fully function as the Messiah.



Biff's wiseacre character develops further as he takes credit for inventing satire, although casting Bartholomew the Cynic as the one who names the style of humor fits well. Intermingling Joshua's serious talk with Biff's scat concerns creates a funny scene on the way to Sepphoris. Mention of the Zealots and crucifixion as the Roman punishment for rebelling sets the stage for an upcoming crisis.

Justus Gallicus lives up to the common term his name sounds like, "justice." He likes Biff and Joshua but deeply dislikes the Greek, partly just for being Greek but mostly because the man is an obnoxious bully. One of the most powerful supporters of the protagonist is a sympathetic character on the opposing side, and Justus rises to this position in this scene.

The dichotomy of religions in ancient Judea becomes obvious. The Romans consider their gods to be more advanced than the Jewish monotheistic Jehovah but tolerate their beliefs as long as taxes are paid, and rebellions do not occur. This is probably a wise direction for an empire to take because tolerating the religions of conquered people costs nothing and avoids the problems inherent with trying to change traditional culture. Justus strictly adheres to this Roman law but has a soft spot in his heart for Biff due to his humor, and Joshua for reasons Justus does not yet understand.

Part I: The Boy, Chapter 5 - 6

Part I: The Boy, Chapter 5 - 6 Summary

On the pretext that Jesus, the hotel service worker, cannot buy periodicals for guests, modern Biff gets rid of Raziel for a while. The angel goes out to buy a copy of Soap Opera Digest, leaving an opportunity for Biff to read the Bible he had found. He examines the Old Testament and thinks it is similar enough to the Torah, although the English language used is more complex than the Hebrew he remembers. He leaves the Gospels for later reading and hides the Bible in the bathroom.

Biff invites Maggie to come along with him and Joshua to play a prank on the Greek's statue of Apollo. The boys, now thirteen years old, intend to circumcise Apollo using their stonecutter skills.

Just as Joshua starts to chip away at Apollo's marble foreskin, a Roman legionnaire discovers them. Suddenly a Zealot knifes the Roman to death, which Joshua condemns as not being the will of God. Maggie recognizes the Zealot as Jeremiah, her uncle. Everyone runs away from the crime scene.

When Biff and Joshua go to work at Sepphoris the next morning, the Romans have restricted access. Nobody can enter the city or leave while a search goes on to find the killer of the Roman legionnaire. Joshua discovers that Joseph, his human father, has been arrested as a suspect. This frightens everyone because if Joseph is found guilty, he and his family will be crucified. Just how far the Romans will go is unknown, where Biff's and Maggie's families may be punished, too. Joshua receives a message from God on how to make things better.

Everyone in Nazareth goes to Sepphoris to plead for Joseph's life. There Joshua puts his plan into action. As a crowd surrounds the dead legionnaire and the newly dug grave, Joshua resurrects the body. The Roman lives long enough to point out his killer, Jeremiah, who runs toward the boys and Maggie with a drawn knife. Biff dives on top of Maggie to protect her, but Gaius Justus Gallicus, using his short sword, kills Jeremiah before he can stab Biff. The resurrected Roman dies again, and Justus sends everyone home with a warning not to pull any more weird pranks until he has had a chance to get thoroughly drunk and sleep it off.

Part I: The Boy, Chapter 5 - 6 Analysis

Modern Biff's take on the Old Testament brings out two important observations. The stories are for the most part the same, but the language has become flowery during translation. He remembers the Hebrew language as being much simpler. This implies that as translators have worked on the Bible over the centuries, the original meanings have been interpreted in ways that sometimes cover more ground than was originally intended.

The attempt at circumcising Apollo is an effective prank story, a way of irritating the Greek that arises from the imaginations of young boys. It involves a nighttime infiltration of Sepphoris and the natural tension that this builds. Then things turn ugly when the Roman legionnaire catches the children in the middle of their prank, and the subsequent murder by Jeremiah. The Romans accuse Joseph of the murder, and a sense of hopelessness enters the story. A silly prank is about to turn unimaginably tragic.

By necessity, the protagonist must somehow turn this situation around through cleverness, daring and good luck. Biff does what he can, which is to pray in his own way for a solution, during which Joshua finds the answer in a simple sign from God—a lizard runs up his leg, reminding Joshua of his resurrection power. The cleverness element satisfied, Joshua dares to attempt raising the dead again, which requires daring in that he had not done so well with his first attempt. This try works better, and the good luck comes in by way of the resurrected Roman legionnaire identifying his murderer before again dying.

This scene is split between two chapters that cover a night and a day. The tense-filled night scene sets up the dramatic day scene with its thriller resolution. Comic elements used involve irony, slapstick, misdirection, and backward reference. To circumcise a Greek statue is ironic because only Jews in the ancient world practiced circumcision, and the Greek had abused Jews. The running away night action is slapstick, and the possibility of tragedy is misdirection. While trying to circumcise the statue, Joshua accidentally breaks off the marble member, which is worth one chuckle. Maggie refers to the marble member, which buys another laugh. Then at the end of the scene, Justus uses the point of his sword to bring Biff's attention to the statue piece lying on the ground, and Biff delivers the punch line, thus completing the elaborate joke.

Part I: The Boy, Chapter 7 - 8

Part I: The Boy, Chapter 7 - 8 Summary

Having obtained his Soap Opera Digest, Raziel wonders about the prophets who foretell future events in the shows. Modern Biff tries to explain that the stories are fiction, not reality, but the angel cannot understand this concept. Biff likens angels to pretty insects. He later reads a few chapters of Matthew and realizes that much has been left out between the time of Jesus' birth and his thirtieth year.

The Romans, upon the appeals of the Pharisees, release Joseph and several other prisoners who had been suspected of the murder, but who must be innocent after Jeremiah's confession and his swift death thereafter by Justus' sword. However, the Pharisees do not do this without expecting something in return. Maggie's mother has promised her betrothal to Jakan. She is to be married to him after six months have passed.

When Joshua and Biff learn of this development, they have an argument. Biff wants Joshua to kill Jakan, but Joshua refuses, as his powers are not meant for killing. Raziel shows up to straighten one thing out—Joshua is not to take a wife, so any romantic feelings toward Maggie should be forgotten. The angel also tells Joshua that he is to seek his destiny, which leaves the boys confused.

Following tradition, many Jews congregate at Jerusalem for Passover, including the boys, their families and Maggie. Along the way, they come upon a young John the Baptist, who is baptizing one of Biff's younger brothers and is nearly drowning the saved boy. John turns out to be Joshua's cousin.

John's parents invite Biff's and Joshua's families over for dinner. Afterwards, John and Joshua argue over which one is the Messiah, and Joshua wins the debate with the help of Biff's supporting arguments about raising the dead and healing the sick. This relieves John, because he does not know how to be the Messiah. Joshua says he does not know either, but he heals John of a rash he has developed from being in water so much during his baptism activities.

When they arrive in Jerusalem, Biff becomes panicky during the slaughter of the lambs in the temple. He cannot breathe and starts to run out, but Joshua calms him and tells him that the slaughter is God's will. Biff does not eat any of the cooked sacrificial lamb and swears off it forever.

Joshua and Biff take in a lesson from old Rabbi Hillel. After the lesson, Joshua asks if he might be the Messiah. Rabbi Hillel responds that Joshua can think he is anything he wants, just as long as he does not talk about it. Biff says that Joshua is the Messiah, and Rabbi Hillel tells Biff that he is too young to know anything. The Rabbi does soften

to Joshua and tells him to go find his three wise men, the Rabbi having heard about the Magi from Joshua's mother.

Mary, Joshua's mother, tells him about the three wise men named Balthesar, Melchior and Gaspar. She knows the general area where Balthesar may be found, a village north of Antioch in Persia, and thinks that Joshua and Biff can find the rich Ethiopian Magus, because not many can be around the village. The boys decide to take the journey and look for Balthesar. They plan to leave the morning of Maggie's wedding as they do not want to watch as she becomes the bully Jakan's wife.

When Biff tells Maggie of their plans the afternoon before they leave, she asks for Joshua to meet her that night. Joshua tells Biff to go in his place. When he does, Maggie jumps him, and they make love. She discovers that Biff has taken Joshua's place, but does not mind.

Part I: The Boy, Chapter 7 - 8 Analysis

John the Baptist enters the story as Joshua's cousin, and even at a young age, John seems crazy. He wears his hair in a wild, unkempt way and has a compulsive urge to baptize everyone he sees if a river or lake is nearby. The comedic element in this is that both John's and Joshua's mothers think that their sons are the Messiah. Where John accepts Joshua's status with relief, he warns that telling his mother would kill her, figuratively speaking.

When the boys arrive in Jerusalem, they are thirteen years old. Joshua needs to find a direction other than stonecutting, and he cannot marry at fourteen, which is the social custom. Biff does not mind the idea of marriage, especially to Maggie, but that possibility has gone away. He is also not so happy about being a stonecutter all his life. An opportunity for adventure presents itself in the form of finding the three wise men who had been present at Joshua's birth. This pushes the plot to the next major part of the story, and along heroic lines—the boys will enter the mysterious and dangerous world on a quest that they barely understand.

Maggie's character takes on a lusty flavor as she jumps Biff, thinking that he is Joshua. She answers an ongoing prayer of Biff's in the process of breaking him into sex. That she does not object to the substitution indicates that she might love Joshua the most, but Biff is not far behind. She faces a bad marriage to Jakan, whom she despises, and she may never see her favorite men again. Just how she plans to handle Jakan's sexual desires is not yet clear, but she knows what she wants and takes it before time runs out. Of course, Biff cooperates enthusiastically.

Part II: Change, Chapter 9 - 10

Part II: Change, Chapter 9 - 10 Summary

The boys make it to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Joshua expresses interest in the details of Biff having sex with Maggie, being as he cannot experience this firsthand. Biff cannot talk about it, but he does arrange for two adjacent inn stalls and a prostitute. Biff and the prostitute have sex in one stall while Joshua stays in the other and asks questions about what they are doing and what it feels like. After a half-dozen attempts with different prostitutes, they give up on the idea, because Joshua still does not understand and they have almost run out of money.

Joshua and Biff hire on a ship to shorten their journey to Antioch, and the captain charges them five shekels apiece on top of their labor. Biff makes a wisecrack to the captain, and the captain responds by throwing him overboard. Biff struggles to keep up with the boat, but then Raziel appears on the mast wearing black robes and with black wings. The sea becomes deadly calm, as the angel demands the captain treat Biff and Joshua well. Frightened out of his wits, the captain agrees.

The captain treats the boys in a kingly manner throughout the rest of the journey and pays them back the shekels at the end. He then directs them to the Silk Road and Antioch.

While on the Silk Road, Joshua buys coffee from a vendor and immediately becomes addicted to the drink. Biff adds a little fresh goat milk, and that improves the flavor tremendously. As they walk along, Joshua bumps into people on purpose and heals them. People look back at him with a dreamy expression, and some follow.

They stop by an old woman's booth and meet a trader named Ahmad who can take them to Balthesar near the city of Kabul if they tend the camels of his caravan, which number one hundred. Ahmad has two dozen men to guard against bandits along the way. The expected bandits attack the caravan in a mountain pass, and the guards kill them as they come down a steep slope on camels. Joshua tries to stop the slaughter and gallops on a camel to the side of one dead bandit. He resurrects the thief, but as soon as this happens, an arrow from a guard kills him again. In a fit of rage, Joshua uses his power to blind the guard.

They spend that night in a Kabul lodging house, and the next morning Ahmad takes the boys to Balthesar's fortress, located within a set of twisting canyons. A Chinese girl insists that only Joshua and Biff enter while Ahmad waits outside to be paid for the supplies he has brought. Balthesar appears as a huge demon, which turns out to be a costume in a little joke that he plays on the boys, and then leads them into the house.

Part II: Change, Chapter 9 - 10 Analysis

Biff's sex life becomes a running joke. He spends most of their money while having fun with prostitutes on the rationalization that he is rendering Joshua a service. In a later argument, Biff tries to claim how much effort it is to have sex while trying to explain it to Joshua. Biff's appeal to emotions falls flat.

The scene on the Mediterranean Sea gives some humor to the otherwise boring trip, while showing how people's attitudes change upon experiencing the supernatural. Falling in line with the running sex joke, the sea captain gives Joshua his ideas about sex, which amounts to a listing of his sexual adventures, some of them quite deviant.

The frustrating of Joshua's resurrection practice costs the guard his eyesight, a result of Joshua's misuse of his power in a weak moment. This scene has an amount of humor to it as well, where the absurdity of the human condition disallows the saving of a bandit's life, especially in the lawlessness on the Silk Road, a situation not implied in the name.

Balthesar's humor goes unappreciated by the genuinely frightened boys. The Magus exploits his reputation as being a demon, which Joshua and Biff have heard along the way. He is actually a lively old man who runs through the house, not fettered in any way.

Part II: Change, Chapter 11 - 15

Part II: Change, Chapter 11 - 15 Summary

Modern Biff finishes reading Matthew and does not recognize him as the same Matthew as Biff had known. He also wonders why the ending is so different from what really happened. Raziel has turned from soap operas to professional wrestling as his television addiction.

Balthesar's fortress is built into the side of a cliff. Biff notices no chisel marks and puzzles over how the construction was done. They go by the room for Balthesar's Chinese concubines and then a mysterious big wooden door with three huge iron bolts and a brass lock with odd characters engraved on it. Balthesar tells the boys that they can go anywhere in the house except into this room.

The old Magus brings Joshua and Biff to a room filled with pillows, a low table loaded with food and drink, and explains that they will both be given tutors and will learn the wisdom of the Chinese masters. The boys find out that Balthesar has eight young Chinese concubines, which amazes Biff.

Biff meets his tutor, a concubine named Tiny Fee of the Divine Dance of Joyous Orgasm, whom he calls Joy for short. She gives him a lesson that involves the tea that she had been serving him for the past three days. She puts something into his tea from a small porcelain vial she wears around her neck. He asks what it is, and she tells him poison. Biff, thinking this a sly joke, drinks the tea and becomes paralyzed. Joy tells him:

"Today's lesson is, if someone puts poison in your tea, don't drink it" (p. 152).

While he is paralyzed, Joy teaches Biff to read Chinese characters, a subject to which he can give his full attention. Two days later, Joy gives him the antidote after she thinks he has learned his lesson.

Joshua, Biff and two of the concubines go to Kabul. From the top of the fortress, they climb a ladder up the cliff to a flat plain above. There Balthesar keeps camels and supplies for this purpose. While in town they find the blind guard from the trip in, and Joshua gives him back his sight. Rather than being grateful, the cured man tries to attack Joshua, but Biff pokes him in both eyes, ala the Three Stooges, and the former guard goes down. They quickly leave the scene.

Over the next few years, Joshua learns what he needs about Chinese philosophy and magic. Biff concentrates on making explosives and the Tao. They celebrate Joshua's birthday with Chinese food, which becomes a tradition for celebrating the Messiah's birthday. Biff sneaks into the concubines' room when Balthesar is busy with Joshua and enjoys their individual skills at making love. He shortens all their unwieldy long names, except for Sue.



When Joshua and Balthesar announce a trip to a distant temple, Biff asks one of the concubines to obtain a wax impression of the key to the mysterious room with the massive door and lock, and she helps him to make a duplicate. One night while Joshua and Balthesar are on their trip, Biff and Joy open the door and let out a horrible demon. The demon proceeds to eat the other seven concubines in their room, and then chases Biff and Joy through the fortress to the top. They keep the demon at bay long enough for Balthesar to return, which he does early, because he senses the demon's escape. Joshua learns the demon's name—Catch, and makes him disappear.

With the demon no longer on earth, Balthesar's true age of around 260 years catches up with him and he dies. Joy inherits a fortune and moves to Kabul, but first gives Biff her vial of paralyzing poison and antidote. She welcomes the two boys, now young adults, to visit her anytime as they leave in search of Gaspar, the second Magus, off in the Chinese mountains. Biff reflects on how Joy had taught him to read and speak Chinese, mix potions and poisons, cheat at gambling, perform slight-of-hand tricks and the art of making love to a woman. Joshua does not talk about what he has learned.

Part II: Change, Chapter 11 - 15 Analysis

Joshua and Biff take different learning paths over their years with Balthesar, who gives his personal attention to Joshua, while Biff learns from the concubines. The knowledge that Joshua needs is quite a bit deeper than what Biff picks up.

Balthesar wants to attain physical immortality, which is his motivation for finding the newborn Joshua in the first place. Ancient tablets in an Afghanistan temple predict Joshua's birth and tell of his connection to immortality. However, Balthesar's method to stay alive far beyond the normal human lifespan involves controlling the demon named Catch, and this takes a constant exercise of will. The catch in Balthesar's method, and by inference the Tao, is that gaining immortality involves too much risk and work. As a result of witnessing this problem, Joshua must continue seeking his destiny.

The demon scenes allow for adventure humor, a comedy of errors. Curiosity gets the best of Biff and Joy when they let Catch out of his containment room. The three exchange clever vocal jabs at one another and find themselves in ridiculous situations. Most of them are within the confines of the fortress that affords ramps, corners and windows in which to set the chase.

Balthesar and Joshua arrive in the nick of time, which is not surprising. Something has to be done about Catch and soon, or Biff will never get to write his gospel. Joshua provides the resolution to the predicament through his compassion for Catch and his ability to send the demon away, exactly to where is unclear, but most likely to hell. Unfortunately for Balthesar, the immortality that Joshua will offer has little to do with the physical world, and so Balthesar's body rapidly deteriorates and dies when the demon is no longer on earth.

The plotting of the adventure follows a long-worn path familiar to readers and moviegoers. Something dangerous chases the protagonist and helper, Joy. Biff and Joy use clever tactics and daring to foil the danger until something destroys, transforms or deflects it. Then the protagonist is free to seek out further adventure, in this case the next Magus, Gaspar.

Part III: Compassion, Chapter 16 - 19

Part III: Compassion, Chapter 16 - 19 Summary

Modern Biff finishes the gospel of Mark, but he finds the story unbelievable and lonely at the end, which prompts a nightmare:

"Had I been asleep? I remember that same red blinking light, ever so dim, playing on the cheekbone and the bridge of the nose of the woman in my nightmare. (It was all I could see of her face.) And those elegant contours fit into the recesses of my memory like a key in the tumblers of a lock, releasing cinnamon and sandalwood and a laugh sweeter than the best day of childhood" (p. 214).

Making their way toward Gaspar's Buddhist monastery, Biff and Joshua come upon the Great Wall of China. The line at the gate is very long, so they try to travel around the wall. A month later, they come back to the gate and wait their turn.

The monks of the monastery, located high upon a mountain, refuse admittance until after three days of telling Joshua and Biff to go away. This is the monastery's way of screening out uncommitted people. Inside, a monk shows the two seekers to their rooms, which are small and humble. Gaspar receives them, gives numbers to substitute for names, orders a monk to feed them and tells them that lessons begin in the morning. The food consists of only a bowl of rice each and tea.

The first lesson in Buddhism confuses Joshua, whom Gaspar hits repeatedly with a bamboo stick, and this offends Biff who defends his friend. Biff decides to leave, but Joshua stays, because he believes that much can be learned from Gaspar. Biff later comes back and joins the monastery. His first task, shaving the yak, does not go well. Joshua heals Biff's broken and smashed body.

Kung fu training ensues, plus a good deal of sitting and emptying the mind. Joshua lets go of all his concepts of self and becomes invisible. Gaspar teaches him about loving your neighbor as thyself, and this convinces Joshua to become visible again, an act of self-love required to project love to others. He learns that full Buddhist enlightenment is just one step along the way.

Gaspar takes the monks, including Joshua and Biff, on a special meditation journey up the mountain. The monks carry rice and tea packed into large bamboo tubes. The going is rough because of the snow, but the kung fu training has prepared them to traverse the mountain by jumping from crag to crag like mountain goats. The monks form a circle in a special place and begin to meditate.

Biff gets cold, because he has not mastered the art of creating his own heat, as the monks and Joshua have. He arranges their sitting bodies to give him the maximum heat and falls asleep. A loud slurping sound wakes him, and sees the yeti, an abominable snowman. Biff wakes Joshua.

Gaspar comes out of his meditation and explains the yeti to Joshua and Biff. The yeti is the last of his kind and behaves as if a cross between a human and a dog. The monks bring the yeti rice and tea in the bamboo cylinders periodically. A short while later, almost everyone returns to the monastery, but Joshua spends a week in the wilderness with the yeti. He learns from the creature's song that humans had slaughtered all the yeti except this one.

Over the next few years, Biff and Joshua master kung fu and Sanskrit so they can read the original scriptures of Buddhism. Joshua regularly visits the yeti and seems happy with his routine, but then one day he tells Biff that the yeti has died from falling ice. They decide to leave the monastery, but not before challenging Gaspar's wisdom. From this, Gaspar admits to an amount of fraud in what he teaches. Joshua and Biff head out to Tamil in India to find Gaspar's brother, the third Magus, Melchior.

Part III: Compassion, Chapter 16 - 19 Analysis

The exasperating teachings of Gaspar about Buddhism involve letting go of all ego, and then filling up on Gaspar's wisdom about kung fu and Sanskrit. Joshua outdoes the master by becoming invisible and demonstrating that he is still a physical being. He and Biff soon outdo the best monks at kung fu as well, so with the practical knowledge secured and the spiritual insight understood, they leave for the next leg of the journey.

The yeti symbolizes innocence in a violent world. Humans fear the yeti even though they are peaceful creatures, and kill them off. This parallels what will happen to Joshua once he becomes the Messiah and talks about the kingdom of God. However, instead of killing the last of Joshua's kind, fearful humans will kill the first of his kind. An interesting twist on the parallel involves how the yeti dies—by falling ice, which may be considered an act of God. An act of God may also lead to Joshua's death, although humans—who supposedly have free will—perform the killing. This indicates that free will and predictability go together, as Biff notes regarding the mysterious door in Balthesar's fortress. A sure way to tempt Biff to open a door is to tell him not to.

Biff never quite grasps Buddhism, and for good reason. He thinks too practically to completely abandon his ego. Most humans cannot imagine letting go of everything, because survival instincts kick in to keep a reserve ego just in case. The whole point of doing this is also a factor. Biff questions the worthiness of attaining enlightenment if all this means is sitting around and doing nothing. In the end, Joshua questions this too, forcing Gaspar to admit he is, to an extent, a fraud. He has never achieved what Joshua does, but then Gaspar is not the Son of God either. Gaspar does not need to do more than he has already, but Joshua does. The Son of God is tasked with bringing generations of humans to the kingdom of God, and he still does not know quite how to do it.

Scat humor appears in this section of the book, along with more slapstick. The overall meaning of the Buddhist experience carries higher levels of ironic humor, where the neophytes become better than the master and reveal his fundamental human

weaknesses. When it comes down to it, Gaspar is making a living, although a humble one, and is in this way no different than anyone else. He nevertheless offers refuge for the monks and practical skills training. His men of peace can kick the stuffing out of anyone presenting a threat, which is ironically funny in itself. Since Joshua cannot strike anyone aggressively, Gaspar modifies his kung fu training to be passive and gives it the tongue-in-cheek name "Jew-do."

Modern Biff's nightmare reflects how the interpretations of Christianity have discounted the loving parts and overly emphasized the horror of the crucifixion. The woman who visits Biff in his dream brings back this love, but her identity is unknown. She could be Mary, Joshua's mother, and being set at the beginning of the Gaspar story section may mean that the inner peace of Buddhism infuses Biff, and by inference, should come back to modern Christianity. A central story thread develops more fully—that Christianity is not only an extension of Judaism but also a consolidation and expansion of ancient religions from China and India.

Part IV: Spirit, Chapter 20 - 22

Part IV: Spirit, Chapter 20 - 22 Summary

While traveling along a road flanked by fields of very tall grass, Biff and Joshua hear a voice calling to them to get off the road. Ahead comes some kind of danger, so they leave the road for the grass. They follow a very thin Indian man as he explains that Kali wants their heads to decorate her altar.

Men with spears chase them through the elephant grass until they come upon a tiger and its kill. The chasing men break into the clearing and the tiger immediately attacks. The men retreat hurriedly.

The Indian man's name is Rumi of the Untouchable caste. He lives in a pit near other Untouchables and their pits. He invites Joshua and Biff to sit in his pit. Rumi then tells of his daughter and how she has been captured to be sacrificed to the god Kali, the taker of lives. Joshua wants to save the daughter and all the other victims from what he considers senseless murder at the temple in Kalighat. He and Biff come up with a plan, but first they must convince the Untouchables of their powers. Biff does slight-of-hand to simulate the killing of an untouchable with the poison that Joy had used on Biff, followed by the antidote.

The Untouchables collect whatever materials they can from around the area. Biff makes gunpowder bombs and a costume to resemble Kali. Joshua and Biff dress as women and go to the temple where the extremely bloody ceremony begins. Biff works his way in back and pops into view, claiming to be Kali. He throws bombs and the explosions dissipate crowd. During the confusion, Joshua gathers all the children to be sacrificed together and takes them away. Biff throws his last bomb into the statue of Kali's mouth and blows it up.

Upon returning the children, Joshua and Biff discover that the parents are not grateful, and in fact resentful. Now the parents have more mouths to feed, and the children's chance to be reborn into a higher caste has been thwarted. Biff thinks the Indian's religion is hideous, but Joshua sees parallels with Judaism. Non-Jews may not attain the kingdom of God, but in Hinduism, people can rise to higher castes through death and rebirth. He also says that Buddhism opens the door to anyone, an attractive quality in the religion.

When Joshua and Biff find Tamil, it turns out not to be a town but a peninsula larger than Israel. They find Melchior six months later sitting in a shallow nook carved out of a cliff face that overlooks the ocean. The Magus' first demonstration of his spiritual abilities involves turning a few grains of rice into an entire bowlful.

Biff goes into town to seek employment but has no salable skills, and a jealous guild controls who can beg. He meets Kashmir, a prostitute adept at the positions in the

Kama Sutra and who charges twenty rupees per session. He returns to the cliff with only a handful of rice, which is all that he could afford to buy at the market. Joshua tells Biff about the Divine Spark that Melchior is teaching him. Biff talks about Kashmir.

Joshua learns to multiply rice, a skill that gives Biff something to sell in the market. He soon earns enough money to hire the services of Kashmir, from whom he learns many of the Kama Sutra positions, and buys an elephant he names Vana. As Joshua learns more from Melchior, Biff's belongings multiply. A sign in the form of an image of Joshua's mother on a temple wall appears. Melchior interprets this as a message for Joshua to return home. The student is ready to become the teacher. Joshua finally knows how to be the Messiah.

Part IV: Spirit, Chapter 20 - 22 Analysis

The ancient sect of Kali did indeed kill many lower-cast humans in its rituals. Today the practice is limited to animals, but blood is still a main ingredient. Killing lambs was a Passover ritual, one that had made Biff stop eating lamb forever. Many other pre-Christian religions required blood sacrifice to the gods, and one of the remarkable accomplishments of Christianity is the elimination of flesh and blood in favor of bread and wine, consecrated to symbolize the sacrifice. The events that Joshua experiences during the Kali adventure bring him closer to this theological solution to a barbaric practice. He also sees the value of allowing everyone into the kingdom of God, regardless of birth, culture and childhood religious training.

However, Joshua has no need to learn anything more than this from the ancient religions of India, besides the manipulation of the material world as taught by Melchior. The learning takes place rapidly, because all Joshua needs is to be directed toward a goal, and he can make it happen from all that he has learned from Gaspar and Balthesar. Melchior tells Joshua why he and the other Magi followed the star to Joshua's birth:

"We were seekers. You are that which is sought, Joshua. You are the source. The end is divinity. In the beginning is the word. You are the word" (p. 300).

One of the primary theological concepts in Christianity is that Joshua is the Word, that the word is love and that this is the way to the kingdom of God.

Biff's adventures with Kashmir add humor to the section. Kama Sutra quotations appear, from which Biff devises several takeoffs for inappropriate contexts, one of his favorite applications of sarcasm. He leaves India a richer man in the material sense, which is fine by him. He also carries with him the kung fu mastery, the sleight-of-hand skills and his ability to cheat at gambling. These talents will serve him well in Israel.

This section completes Joshua's education on how to be the Messiah. He has learned the limitations of the ancient world's religions. The Chinese ways are too materialistic but do have benefits for living an ethical life. The Buddhist way can work for everyone regardless of birth circumstances, but may lead to an unsatisfactory resolution. The way

of the ancient Indians, termed Hinduism today because of colonization and classification, results in the unfair treatment of humans through the caste system. Joshua must now put into action those things he has learned in the East through his ministry in Israel.

Part V: Lamb, Chapter 23 - 24

Part V: Lamb, Chapter 23 - 24 Summary

The modern Biff finishes reading the Gospels, and he finds fault with them all. The complete story is not told, and Biff promises to fix this situation.

Two months after leaving India, Biff and Joshua arrive in Kabul. They visit with Joy, known to the townspeople as the Cruel and Accursed Dragon Princess, an identity she promotes for security reasons. Joy is as beautiful as ever and wears more jewelry. Joshua tells Joy about the wonderful things he has learned from the Magi, which draws Biff into the enthusiasm. They stay for four days with Joy and appreciate her hospitality, then trade the elephant for camels and continue their journey.

A windstorm comes up in the high desert, driving Joshua and Biff into Antioch, where Joshua discovers an inn by knocking his head against the hanging sign hard. This results in two cuts and raises a large bump. A man at the inn gives Joshua a piece of linen to wipe his face, and the blood leaves a likeness of Joshua on the cloth. The man, who is from Turin, asks if he can keep it. Biff and Joshua leave the next morning under a clear sky.

Upon crossing into Galilee, they hear about John the Baptist and his followers, some of whom think John is the Messiah. They arrive in Nazareth and seek out their families. Joseph, Joshua's father, has died. Biff's mother bawls him out for not writing over the past seventeen years. He meets two younger brothers who were born during his absence and gives a mongoose to his mother. His mother starts to nag him about getting married, so Biff escapes to Joshua's house.

On the way out of town the next morning, Joshua picks up Bartholomew as his first disciple. They happen upon John the Baptist and a crowd of 500 of his followers. Biff and Joshua camp with him that night. John eats only locusts and honey, and when Joshua tells him about the Divine Spark he had learned from Malchior, John suggests calling it the Holy Ghost so people will understand. Biff and Joshua stay with John for a year and work out the best ways to deliver Joshua's message, because John has the preaching experience. Joshua gains another disciple named Philip.

One morning when John baptizes Joshua, the sky opens up, and the voice of God declares Joshua his son, with whom He is pleased. Joshua, his head underwater, is the only person who does not hear the voice. He decides to go into the desert for forty days and nights.

Biff takes the opportunity to visit Maggie, the wife of Jakan, now an influential Pharisee. She lets Biff into the house while Jakan is away, and they catch up on old times. Jakan comes home and fusses with the gate. Biff must leave quickly, but not before Maggie

invites him and Joshua to a wedding she must attend the next month in Cana. Biff exits without being discovered.

Joshua comes out of the desert, thin from starvation and burned in the elements. Biff meets him and offers food and water. Joshua reports that he had met the Devil in the desert, who had tempted him with power, wealth and sex.

Part V: Lamb, Chapter 23 - 24 Analysis

Three primary plot moves take place in the heroic journey back home. An old ally is visited first, Joy. She hears about the amazing things that Joshua has learned and gives homage to Biff in one of his favorite ways—they have sex, during which he can show off his new knowledge of the Kama Sutra. The second plot move is the return home, but in this tale, nobody in Nazareth notices. The heroes left quietly and returned to quiet, as nobody understands the significance. This requires the third plot move, and that is to bring a preaching expert onto the scene, John the Baptist. He teaches Joshua how to effectively deliver the message.

The origin of the Shroud of Turin becomes not the linen from Joshua's crucifixion, but cloth used to clean the blood from his face after conking into a hanging sign during a sandstorm. This adds slapstick and irony to the humor, because the Shroud of Turin supposedly wrapped Joshua at his death, not cleaned his face after an awkward mishap. Other humor opportunities involve two blind beggars who mistake Biff for a woman after he visits Maggie and his reaction to John living in a pit like the Untouchables in India. Biff's mother takes on the nagging Jewish mother role, driving him out of the house due to her neurotic dotage.

The scene at Maggie's house serves to bring her back into the story and to set up a subsequent scene. Meanwhile, Joshua finds the Devil in the desert where the chief demon, who is tall and that is all Joshua has to say about his looks, offers power, wealth and sex. Joshua passes this last test and is ready to preach.

Part V: Lamb, Chapter 25 - 26

Part V: Lamb, Chapter 25 - 26 Summary

On the way to the wedding in Cana, Philip calls a friend of his over to join the band of Joshua's followers, a young man named Nathaniel, who is a rather naïve person. A little farther along, they come upon two blind beggars who had helped Biff climb atop the wall around Maggie's house. Joshua cures them and asks what they see. Everything looks brown, because everything is brown in this part of the country, which disappoints the beggars.

At the wedding, Maggie invites everyone in except Bartholomew, who prefers the company of dogs, but dogs are not allowed at the wedding. The party has lots of food but no wine. Biff learns that John the Baptist has been arrested for inciting people to riot and tells Joshua. Maggie asks him to do something about the lack of wine, so Joshua turns water into wine and the party action ratchets upward. Biff takes Maggie outside. He asks her to become one of Joshua's followers, but she cannot due to being married to Jakan. Biff suggests that Jakan will divorce her if she joins. Maggie reconsiders and promises to get word back to him on her decision.

After the party winds down, a man named Andrew joins the disciples. He invites them to his home in Capernaum, because his nephews had stolen their camels, which he returns. While watching Andrew and his brother Peter fishing, Joshua asks Peter to become a disciple. Peter eventually agrees and helps recruit James and John, two other fishermen. Capernaum becomes their base of operations from which Joshua preaches and heals in the surrounding countryside and villages.

Gaius Justus Gallicus, now a commander of the Sixth Legion, asks Joshua to heal his servant, who is in another town. Joshua does this, because he allows anyone into his kingdom, a principle with which Biff does not agree. However, this is performing a healing on the Sabbath and against Jewish law. The act of healing draws the attention of the Pharisees, as does forgiving a man's sins on the following Sabbath. According to Jewish law, only God can forgive sins. Some Pharisees loudly object, which leads to a scene where Biff punches one of them twice. Joshua decides to preach across the lake to the gentiles.

While waiting for a boat to cross the lake, Biff recruits Matthew. A storm comes up while crossing, but Joshua quiets the weather down. A huge madman throws rocks at the boat as it approaches the shore of Gadarene. Joshua casts out the many demons that have possessed the man into a herd of pigs, and then commands the pigs into the water to drown. This angers the gentiles, so Joshua and his disciples must leave in a rush.

Part V: Lamb, Chapter 25 - 26 Analysis

Human nature and spiritualism collide. The cured beggars can see for the first time in their lives, and what they see disappoints them. They leave muttering among themselves without a word of thanks to Joshua, fully enwrapped in their own egos. This is just the beginning of many future disappointments, as Joshua has gained great wisdom and control from his studies in the East, but the rest of humankind has not.

Maggie kisses Joshua too passionately at the wedding as her sister Martha watches on. She comments to Biff that Maggie must be looking to get stoned. Stoning is the Jewish sentence of death, where crucifying is the Roman method of capital punishment. When a person is stoned, rocks are piled on until the weight crushes the person to death. Another point that foreshadows events to come is the constant monitoring within the Jewish community as to who follows the laws and who does not.

After turning the water into wine, Joshua gets drunk after hearing about John the Baptist's death, because he feels guilty about it. He comes stumbling out to Maggie and Biff with an idea to use bunnies in celebrations about anything bad that happens to him, a comical explanation about the traditions around Easter. This wine-inspired idea comes from a pet rabbit that Joshua had earlier been petting. In actuality, the Easter rabbits come from pre-Christian spring fertility rites.

Gaius Justus Gallicus becomes an important friend after Joshua heals his sick servant, but the unlawful action on the Sabbath angers the Pharisees. Not having much luck with his ministry kickoff, Joshua's first attempt at preaching to the gentiles must be cut short due to the dead pigs and the understandable negative reaction of their gentile owners. Sometimes the spirit and world work together, but oftentimes-worldly concerns directly conflict with the spiritual. This conflict continues to build as Joshua carries out his ministry.

Part V: Lamb, Chapter 27 - 29

Part V: Lamb, Chapter 27 - 29 Summary

Upon invitation, Joshua and some of his disciples visit Jakan at his house in Bethany. They sit with five other Pharisees, all members of the Judaic law enforcement council known as the Sanhedrin. Jakan questions Joshua about his miracles, healings and casting out demons. At the same time, Maggie tries to communicate something to Biff from the kitchen door through signs and silently mouthed words. Biff finally understands that she wants to see him outside, and he excuses himself from the table.

Maggie tells Biff that she wants to talk with him and Joshua. Biff gives her a leather pouch and a parchment of instructions, and then goes back into the house. A few minutes later, Maggie screams from the kitchen. She runs into the room with green foam running out of her mouth, pretending to be possessed by demons. Biff and Joshua drag her out of the house.

They take Maggie to her sister Martha who lives with her brother Simon, a leper. Joshua offers to heal the leprosy, but Simon seems to ignore the affliction. They talk about the stunt with Maggie being possessed and expect Jakan to divorce her as a result. Maggie joins with the disciples. At camp on the Mount of Olives near an oil press, two more disciples join—Thaddeus and Thomas. Five days later Judas Iscariot and Simon, both Zealots, join.

Joshua and his disciples hear about the beheading of John the Baptist. On their way to the synagogue the next day, the mayor of Magdala begs Joshua to raise his daughter whom he claims has just died. When Joshua and Biff look at her, they discover that she is only sleeping and probably drugged. They realize that this is a trap and try to get out of it by announcing the facts, but the Pharisees seem unconvinced.

A Roman soldier delivers a message from Gaius Justus Gallicus to Joshua and his disciples. Justus informs them that Jakan has divorced Maggie and that the Pharisees have decided to kill Joshua. Additionally, Herod fears Joshua after killing John the Baptist and hearing about all the miracles that Joshua has performed. Justus advises Joshua to be careful, which prompts Maggie to suggest hiding, but Joshua wants to deliver an important sermon to the followers of John. Biff helps Joshua compose the Sermon on the Mount.

Philip and Thaddeus bring three thousand of John's followers from Judea and another thousand from Galilee. Joshua multiplies a few loaves of bread and fish to feed the crowd and gives his sermon while Pharisees watch and prepare condemning reports.

Joshua selects from the disciples those who are to become apostles, or carriers of his messages. They number twelve to correspond with the twelve tribes of Israel and consist of Andrew, Bartholomew, James, John, Judas, Matthew, Nathaniel, Peter, Philip,

Thaddeus, Thomas and Simon. Biff appoints a geographical area for each apostle to cover. The next day seventy more followers volunteer to become apostles.

After Joshua, Maggie and Biff lay low for three months, word arrives through Matthew that the Pharisees have lifted their death sentence on Joshua due to the influence of a wealthy merchant, Joseph of Arimathea. Matthew presents a dinner invitation letter that guarantees safe passage to the merchant's house. The invitation includes Maggie as her brother Simon, also called Lazarus, is dying and has called for her.

By the time they reach Jerusalem, Lazarus has died and been buried four days. Joshua raises him from the dead, but the leper's body needs further repairs. Joshua tends to this and heals the leprosy.

Joshua goes to the merchant Joseph's house alone, expecting a grilling from the Pharisees. Biff secretly follows and spies on the dinner guests through a window. He spots a priest and two temple guards approaching the house. When the priest goes into the house to harangue Joshua with questions, Biff knocks out the guards and breaks their spears. After the dinner, Joshua tells everyone at Martha's house how it went, which was not well. Joshua had lost his temper and threatened the Pharisees, who then put the death sentence back on his head.

Knowing that something bad will come out of this, Joshua does one last big sermon to five thousand of his followers, where he walks on water out to a boat on the Sea of Galilee, because he had just eaten and did not want cramps. He then charges Peter to build his church after Joshua dies in Jerusalem at the next Passover. The apostles do not like the news about Joshua dying and try to talk him out of it, but to no avail.

Part V: Lamb, Chapter 27 - 29 Analysis

Joshua walks a narrow path between keeping his ministry going and gaining the wrath of the Pharisees. On one hand, he must continue the healings, although the miracles are to address practical matter such as feeding the multitudes and avoiding swimmer's cramps. Anybody can do the same things, given enough training in the case of the miracles and enough faith in the case of healings. Some of the apostles gain the healing power through their faith. However, the Pharisees cannot tolerate this amount of change, and so they ultimately place a death sentence upon Joshua, because he threatens their political power and material wealth.

The appearance of Judas and Simon as Zealots plays an important part in the story, because they symbolize the material world, while Joshua preaches about the life after. He becomes frustrated with his disciples, now turned apostles, when they fail to understand the parables meant to explain the difference. Maggie comes up with the solution:

""You two [Joshua and Biff] are the ninnies here. You both rail on them about their intelligence, when that doesn't have anything to do with why they're here. Have either one of you heard them preach? I have. Peter can heal the sick now. I've seen it. I've

seen James make the lame walk. Faith isn't an act of intelligence. It's an act of imagination. Every time you give them a new metaphor for the kingdom they see the metaphor, a mustard seed, a field, a garden, a vineyard, it's like pointing something out to a cat—the cat looks at your finger, not at what you're pointing at. They don't need to understand it, they only need to believe, and they do. They imagine the kingdom as they need it to be, they don't need to grasp it, it's there already, they can let it be. Imagination, not intellect" (p. 394).

Meanwhile, the Zealots want Joshua to drive the Romans out of Israel and restore the physical kingdom. However, Joshua is not on earth to change politics but to open the doors to his father's kingdom in Heaven, and to open the doors to everybody—Romans included.

Joshua has known for some time what his fate must be and finally announces it to Biff, Maggie and some of his apostles. This solidifies his decision to enter Jerusalem during the next Passover, where everyone expects the Pharisees to entrap Joshua and kill him. No matter how hard anyone tries to stop him, Joshua thwarts their attempts. Maggie and Biff tie him up, but no knot can hold the Messiah.

Part VI: Passion, Chapter 30 - 35

Part VI: Passion, Chapter 30 - 35 Summary

On Sunday, Joshua waits outside the gate to Jerusalem while one of his apostles looks for a donkey for Joshua to ride upon, as is written in prophesy. The apostles conspire not to find a donkey, and as night falls, Joshua leaves for Bethany where the apostles have congregated at Simon's house. There he gives a lecture:

"There is nothing you can do to stop this from happening!" Joshua screamed at the apostles, who were gathered in the front room of Simon's house. Martha ran from the room crying when Joshua glared at her. Simon looked at the floor, as did the rest of us. 'The priest and the scribes will take me, and put me on trial. They will spit on me and scourge me and then they will kill me. I will rise from the dead on the third day and walk among you again, but you cannot stop what must happen. If you love me, you will accept what I'm telling you'" (p. 402).

On Monday, Joshua leads all his apostles, including Biff, into Jerusalem. They see a woman named Jamal being dragged by Pharisees to trial for adultery, and Joshua pleads for her life by asking for the man among the Pharisees who has no sin. They cannot lie, because Joshua knows all their sins. He wins and tells the woman to go and sin no more.

They move to the Temple and Joshua tries to preach, but vendors of various types interrupt with their sales cries for sacrificial animals and other goods. Joshua loses his patience and turns over the moneychangers' tables, from whose profits the priests of the temple receive large royalties. The Romans watch from outside the temple as a group of angry priests comes forward. One asks by what authority Joshua heals. He answers with a question: "By what authority did John baptize?" (p. 408) while healing a little boy. The inquisition goes on for two hours. The Romans prepare for trouble, which would mean death for many Jews.

Biff grabs Joshua from behind, and the apostles make a wedge as Biff drags the Messiah out of the temple. Soon, Joshua gains safety in Joseph of Arimathea's house.

On Tuesday, the apostles ensure that Joshua does not go to the temple and turn himself in. He washes everyone's feet in a symbolic gesture and eats that evening at Joseph's table, which is set for the Essene Passover. There he performs the first consecration of bread and wine. Joshua tells everyone that they will have to deny him, and especially Peter who is to build the new religion. Joshua tells Judas that he will betray him, and Judas bolts out of the house. He instructs Biff to go to Bethany and wait for him, which is a ruse to get Biff out of the way.

Biff comes up with a plan to paralyze Joshua using the poison and antidote from Joy, and explains it to those in Simon's house. In the early morning, John arrives with the news that Joshua had been captured at Gethsemane.

On Wednesday, Maggie and Biff go to Joseph's house and demand to know what happened. Joseph tells them that he went with the priests to keep them from killing Joshua in Gethsemane, which he knew might happen, because the Romans do not allow stoning during Passover. Joseph goes on to describe the one-sided trial where the prosecution can call witnesses, but Joshua cannot. He also reveals the fact that Jakan is the prosecutor. Joseph goes to the trial and promises to speak up for Joshua and report back if anything important happens. Maggie and Biff wait for him into the night and make love. Joseph does not return.

On Thursday, Simon and Andrew come to Joseph's house with the news that Joshua is being flogged in the high priest's palace. Biff panics and Maggie reminds him of the plan to poison Joshua. They go to the Antonia Palace near the Temple and see Joshua among a throng of guards. Joseph tells them that Joshua had admitted to being the Son of God, and this confirmed the charge of blasphemy against him. The temple guards hand Joshua over to the Romans. Biff notices Pilate and Justus on a balcony.

A half hour later, Joshua reappears in bonds and escorted by Roman soldiers. A crowd follows. Biff pulls Maggie aside and tells her the plan is still on. He intimidates a Roman centurion by rapidly snatching the soldier's sword and holding it under his chin twice, and then convinces the centurion to take him to Justus. Biff asks Justus not to damage Joshua's body too much when he is put on the cross. Justus agrees to this and arranges for a wedge on the cross upon which Joshua can hold himself up by bracing his feet. Biff leaves the fortress.

He joins Maggie, and they watch as from the balcony as Pilate asks the crowd what should be done with Joshua, who two soldiers hold upright. He wears a crown of thorns and has been further beaten by Roman soldiers. The crowd screams to crucify him, and Pilate makes motions as if washing his hands.

On Friday, Joseph explains to the assembled apostles at his house that Pilate has agreed to release the body of Joshua to him. Biff goes over the poisoning plan with Peter, who is to heal Joshua once Biff administers the antidote. The idea is to make Joshua look dead to the Romans, but he will only be paralyzed from the poison.

Joshua carries his cross to the hill, and the Romans nail him on and erect the cross. A half hour later Biff approaches the four Roman soldiers assigned to watch as Joshua dies, and Biff proposes a dice game. Biff lets them win to buy time until two women approach with a sponge and a long pole. They ask to give Joshua a drink of water, and while preparing the sponge, Biff sneaks a few drops of the poison into the sponge. The women offer the water and poison to Joshua, and he seems to drink it, but the poison has no effect. An impatient soldier runs his spear into Joshua's heart. In a few moments, he dies on the cross.

While going away from the cross, Biff sees Judas and chases after him. Biff catches Judas near a cliff and cypress tree. Biff hangs him with his own sash, then Biff steps over the cliff and falls to his death.

Part VI: Passion, Chapter 30 - 35 Analysis

Biff's story about Joshua's death contradicts several major points in other stories, and of course is fiction. Joshua does not go into Jerusalem on a donkey, although he prefers to do so. He does not die from crucifixion but by the spear of a Roman soldier. Judas does not hang himself out of guilt—Biff hangs him out of rage.

Remarkable to this story is the maintenance of viewpoint. Biff has no idea what Joshua and Pilate say to each other. He cannot have this knowledge, because he is not present. His viewpoint, as are the viewpoints of the apostles, is from the outside of the building.

Another consistency involves motivation. Joshua not only overturns the moneychanger tables, but attacks all the vendors in the temple. His motivation makes sense, because the temple has become a center of commerce, where live commercials interrupt his spiritual teaching. On top of this, he knows what must happen and has lost any sense of self-preservation or caution.

Biff's story of Joshua's last days is well-constructed fiction prepared by a successful humor writer of national bestsellers. It rings more true than the Gospels because of this, and that is the grand irony of the story, especially for those who believe in Biblical infallibility. Anticipating a negative reaction, the author gives a warning at the beginning of the story and an apology at the end. The book title itself is constructed to turn away those who may take offense. For all his readers, Moore delivers a Joshua who is both human and the Son of God. The author presents the unknown childhood pal, Biff, as the only person who truly understands him who would become Jesus Christ, the inspiration for a new world religion.

Characters

Biff (Levi)

Biff is the childhood pal of Joshua, later known as Jesus Christ. He grows up with Joshua in Nazareth and knows of his special station in life. Always quick with a wisecrack, Biff writes his gospel about the incidents leading up to Joshua's ministry that leads to his crucifixion. Biff tells about their mutual love for Maggie, Joshua's use of his powers to get out of jams, and the travels to the East where Joshua learns how to be the Messiah.

Biff also learns useful skills like kung fu and the manufacturing of explosives while with Joshua. Not having restrictions on his sexuality, Biff practices the erotic arts with eight Chinese concubines and later with a prostitute familiar with the Kama Sutra. However, his time with Gaspar involves celibacy and strict discipline. Where Joshua must learn very deep wisdom, Biff puts up with the situations simply because he wants to be near his friend.

The love that Biff has for Joshua causes him to step off a cliff after Joshua's death on the cross. The intensity of his feelings catches Biff by surprise, since he usually has the lightness of humor to bring him through tough times. He kills Judas for betraying Joshua, even though Joshua had foretold the betrayal as being a necessary step toward the destiny that God has in store.

After finishing his gospel, Biff receives something dear to him. Maggie had been writing her own gospel in the hotel room across from his, and she becomes his reward. The two head off into their still young lives with money and their love for one another, while Joshua as Jesus Christ reigns in his father's kingdom of Heaven.

Joshua

Joshua grows up in Nazareth with Biff, his childhood pal. Born the Son of God but not yet known as the Messiah, Joshua carries a heavy burden. He must somehow convince enough people that he is the Messiah, and he must learn the ancient wisdom that will make him the Messiah, a man capable of accepting an early death by the horribly painful method of crucifixion.

A rabbi suggests that Joshua visit the three Magi who had come to witness his birth. Balthasar, in what is now Iraq, shows him the ancient Chinese ways. Gaspar in China conditions him to Buddhism. Melchior in India teaches him the ways of miracles, except all Joshua needs by this time is a little direction.

Biff and Joshua return to Israel, where Joshua begins his ministry. He collects disciples, becomes baptized by John the Baptist, gives many sermons and heals many more people. His miracles include turning water into wine at a wedding, multiplying food,



raising the dead and walking on water. Multitudes of people accept him as the Messiah, which gains the attention of the Pharisees, who plot to kill him. They succeed with the help of the Romans. Joshua dies on the cross, which is as much as Biff knows firsthand.

Maggie (Mary Magdalene)

Maggie becomes a friend of Joshua and Biff when they are all quite young. She loves both, but Joshua especially. However, she can never have him for a lover or husband, because God does not allow it. Maggie must marry Jakan, a childhood bully who becomes a wealthy Pharisee, due to a family arrangement. She does not see Joshua or Biff for the better part of two decades while they travel and Joshua learns to be the Messiah.

When the two come back from the East, Maggie is ready to force Jakan to divorce her in order that she can join with Joshua's ministry. Biff helps her put on an elaborate ruse of being possessed by devils, seven to be exact, which she states between devilish growls and curses. This leaves Jakan no choice but to divorce Maggie.

Maggie has a way of condensing Joshua's teachings into common sense, where his disciples-turned-apostles do not need to understand how things work, merely have faith that they will. She also has no problem telling the Messiah exactly what she thinks, even to the point of opposing his destiny.

John the Baptist

John the Baptist is Joshua's cousin. Some think that John is the Messiah, but later side with Jesus after Herod beheads John. Looking and acting quite insane, John lives in a pit and eats only honey and locusts. When he baptizes, he nearly drowns his followers. Herod ignores him until John starts calling Herod's wife a slut, something his mind latches onto and cannot let go. John's greatest claim to fame is that he baptizes Joshua, and his greatest contribution is preparing the way for the Messiah.

Balthesar

Balthesar is the first Magus that Joshua and Biff visit. Balthesar lives for 260 years by keeping a demon named Catch contained within his fortress. Balthesar enjoys the attentions of eight Chinese concubines and lives in luxury. Biff stops all this when he releases the demon while Balthesar and Joshua travel to a temple. They return to find Biff and the only surviving concubine, Joy, fighting the demon. Joshua sends the demon away, but this causes Balthesar to die.

Gaspar

Gaspar is the second Magus that Joshua and Biff visit. He lives in a Buddhist monastery in the mountains of China. Gaspar teaches Joshua to let go of his ego, which results in Joshua becoming invisible. The Magus also teaches kung fu to both Joshua and Biff and introduces them to the yeti, with whom Joshua spends much time. In the end, Gaspar must admit to being partially a fraud.

Melchior

Melchior is the third Magus that Joshua and Biff visit. He lives in a cave overlooking the seacoast of India. Melchior teaches Joshua how to multiply food and other things that an enlightened Buddhist can do that seem miraculous. Another important teaching is the Divine Spark, which becomes the Holy Ghost in Joshua's sermons. The Magus tells Joshua that it is time to go back to Israel.

Jakan

Jakan is a childhood bully that Maggie must marry due to a family arrangement. He grows up to become a wealthy and influential Pharisee. When Joshua returns, Jakan mounts a campaign to kill off the Messiah, which is ironically exactly what Joshua wants. During Joshua's trial with the Jews, Jakan serves as the prosecutor.

Raziel

Raziel is the angel charged with the task of raising Biff from the dead to write his gospel. He does this and keeps Biff a prisoner in a hotel room. Raziel appears in Biff's gospel repeatedly, once as a black angel who frightens a ship captain to treat Joshua and Biff well. The angel becomes addicted to soap operas and wrestling while watching television in the hotel room.

Gaius Justus Gallicus

Justus is an officer in the Sixth Legion of the Roman army. He takes a liking to Joshua and Biff during their childhood. When Joshua returns to Israel as the Messiah, Justus asks Joshua to heal one of his servants, which the Messiah does. Later, Justus helps Biff with his plan to save Joshua's life, a plan that fails.

Joseph of Arimathia

Joseph of Arimathia is an ally to Joshua and his apostles during the days leading up to Joshua's crucifixion. Joseph reports on how the Pharisees capture Joshua, and how the

trial goes. He allows the apostles to use his house in Jerusalem, including Biff and Maggie.

Bartholomew

Bartholomew is the town idiot in Nazareth. Biff discovers that the idiot is actually a very intelligent Greek philosopher who follows the ways of the ancient Cynics. This philosophy rejects society, personal hygiene and promotes crazy behavior in the pursuit of happiness. Bartholomew becomes Joshua's first disciple and one of the apostles.

Joy

Joy is the only concubine among eight who survives when Biff releases Balthesar's human-eating demon. The other seven become breakfast. Joy inherits the Magus' fortune and lives in Kabul. When Biff and Joshua pass through on their way to Israel, Joy welcomes them into her home and entertains. Biff benefits the most from her hospitality.



Objects/Places

Nazareth

Nazareth is the childhood home of Biff and Joshua. They leave the town for their journey to the East and return to it after Joshua learns how to be the Messiah.

Jerusalem

Jerusalem is where many Jews congregate for Passover. Joshua goes to Jerusalem, turns over the moneychanger tables, goes through a trial and is crucified on a nearby hill.

Bethany

Bethany is where Maggie's sister Martha lives in the house of their brother Simon, also known as Lazarus. Bethany becomes a central location during Joshua's ministry.

Sea of Galilee

Joshua does much of his early preaching and disciple-collecting near the Sea of Galilee. This is where he walks on the water and charges Peter with the task of building Joshua's temple.

Sepphoris

Sepphoris is where Biff and Joshua learn stonecutting from Biff's father. Jeremiah the Zealot, uncle to Maggie, kills a Roman soldier in Sepphoris.

Kabul

Kabul is the Persian town near Balthesar's fortress. Joshua heals a man in the town whom he had blinded in an earlier fit of rage.

China

China is where Gaspar's Buddhist Monastery lies. Here, Joshua becomes completely enlightened and meets the yeti.

India

India is where Joshua and Biff find Melchior, but not before learning about the deadly cult of Kali. The two save Untouchable children during a Kali ritual, but the Untouchables fail to appreciate the gesture.

Torah

The Torah is the sacred writings of the Jewish religion. Many of its books appear as the Old Testament in the modern Christian Bible. The Pharisees try to argue the Torah with Joshua, but the Messiah knows his scriptures well.

Sacrificial Lambs

During Passover in Jerusalem, thousands of lambs are sacrificed. The slaughter sickens Biff, and he never eats lamb again.

Sacrificial People

The cult of Kali sacrifices strangers and Untouchable children to Kali. The practice disgusts Biff. He cannot understand the religious purpose, although he can describe the logic behind it in his gospel.

Cross

The Cross is the primary Christian symbol as Joshua's dies on one. Justus orders that the body not be too harmed during the process of nailing Joshua to the cross, part of Biff's failed plan to save the Messiah's life.

Temple

The Temple in Jerusalem is the central worshipping place in ancient Israel. Joshua turns over the moneychangers' tables inside the Temple, which leads to his trial and crucifixion.

Themes

Spiritualism versus Materialism

Confusion exists on just what the Messiah is supposed to do for Israel. The Zealots think that Joshua will drive the Romans out of the country and restore the Jewish kingdom on earth. However, the politics of earth are of no concern to the Messiah. He has been sent to open the kingdom of Heaven to all humans, regardless of birth origins or politics. The implication is that God is tired of dealing with free-will humans, and thereby sends the Son to handle the situation of ancient people gone wild.

Biff embodies the materialistic man. He lusts after women and enjoys the pleasures available to him, although his time in the Buddhist monastery involves none of that. Once out and making money through Joshua's ability to multiply food, he loads up with enough material goodies to burden an elephant. At Joshua's death, the emotions of the tragedy overwhelm Biff. He commits both murder and suicide.

Joshua cannot lust after women, although being a healthy man he would like to. The principle that even the thought of sin is the same as performing the sin requires baptism to clean Joshua's soul before he begins his ministry. Then, as a perfect soul in a perfected body and having a highly disciplined mind, Joshua proceeds to offer salvation to the world. According to the modern Gospels, the confusion between kingdoms on earth with the kingdom of Heaven leads to the crucifixion, but in Biffs account, blasphemy is the accusation. Exactly why Pilate decides to crucify is not included, because Biff does not know.

Tradition versus Change

The Pharisees lead wealthy and privileged lives in ancient Israel. They naturally want to keep the status quo as a result, and a young upstart like Joshua threatens to knock them off their pedestals. Likewise, the Romans do not care if some young Jewish man claims to be the Messiah just as long as he does not whip up a rebellion. Therefore, the Pharisees strictly enforce traditional Jewish law, and the Romans encourage this handy way of saving time, effort and money for the Roman Empire.

Biff plays with the Jewish traditions. He likes to use his sarcastic humor to point out that Moses lived quite a long time ago and that the Egyptian enslavement has no relevance in his life. He makes fun of the mourning tradition and tries to hire himself out as a professional mourner, a concept based on sarcasm.

Joshua is the undeniable agent of change. He brings teachings from the East that do not conflict with Jewish traditions but certainly expand the ideas on how to live a just and righteous life. He offers the Pharisees airtight logic during the inquisitions he must face. Most of this is tolerable until Joshua overturns the moneychangers' tables in the

Temple of Jerusalem. This rebels against a major cash cow for the Temple, and is thus intolerable.

Humor and Life

Biff possesses an unshakable sense of humor. This helps him through the tough times that he and Joshua must face in childhood and adulthood. Joshua often appreciates the humor and shows this with his attempt to understand how it works. The problem is that humor needs to be felt and known intuitively in order to perform it. Analysis can be done and the process explained, but that does not substitute for intuition and never makes a good comedian.

Maggie has her own humor that complements Biff's. She gives her greatest performance while pretending to be possessed by demons in Jakan's house, although the scene with the huge cobra has its power as well. Biff describes Maggie as a woman who laughs easily, as opposed to her more sullen sister Martha.

The Buddhist monks display humor too in the way they reject people at the monastery door with insulting yet inventive slurs. Gaspar's typically inscrutable Zen paradoxes and maddening metaphors finally drive Biff and Joshua to make fun of one involving a boat just before they leave. An irony in the Buddhist quest is that Joshua achieves full enlightenment in a relatively short time, while Gaspar has never accomplished this. Here the humor is also tragic, and so Biff refrains from overdoing his sarcasm. Humor can be cruel if not done skillfully, because life is cruel.

Nature of God

One of the greatest changes that Christianity brings to the world is the elimination of blood sacrifices to a demanding god. Joshua demonstrates to his apostles how they can transform bread and wine into symbolic flesh and blood, thus saving the lives of many children and animals needlessly slaughtered in the name of God. The Indians kill children, and the Jews slaughter lambs. While not mentioned, the Romans also sacrifice to their gods. Joshua invents the symbolic sacrifice as a kindness to humans, indicating that the nature of God is not one that demands blood and flesh to earn favors.

Biff explains the situation in his earthy manner, but the idea is that the God of the Old Testament no longer wants to strike deals, also called covenants, with chosen people. God wants humans to behave rightly and through the exercise of free will based on love. Until Joshua shows up, only those highly self-disciplined humans achieve this, such as Abraham, Moses and Buddha. Joshua gives an easier path for the average person, offering salvation for those who love through him. This is why Christians believe that Heaven can only be attained by accepting Christ as the way. Of course, the followers of other religions have different ideas about the nature of God, and non-followers have no idea or ideas that are very private.

Christianity finds its base in the Gospels, which contain the transcriptions of Joshua's verbal sermons. No original records written in Joshua's hand exist. One universal theme among religions is that the nature of God requires faith, beginning with faith that God exists in the first place. What Joshua adds to this is a second part of God in which to have faith, the Son, and a third, the Holy Ghost, which he defines as the little piece of God in everyone, or the Divine Spark as the Magus Melchior puts it.

Society and Religion

Religion shapes society both in the modern and ancient worlds. The Jews of Joshua's time celebrate their holidays, as do the Romans. Cultural history plays a major role in the celebrations, such as the slaughtering of lambs for Passover as a reminder of a particular event in which the Angel of Death passed over houses marked with the blood of a lamb.

Biff refers to a cultural trait of Jews—guilt. The guilt comes directly from a religion in which human behavior is strictly regulated and watched, especially eating habits and sexual activities. However, Biff seems quite free from his guilt to the point of eating bacon regularly, and Joshua concurs that God does not really care what humans eat. As for Biff's sexual activities, Joshua is curious to understand but does not criticize Biff's appetite for the erotic. On the other hand, Jewish law requires the penalty of death for female adulterers. Joshua goes directly against this law by forgiving the woman being dragged into Jerusalem to her death.

The Pharisees enjoy their lives of wealth while haranguing people to be good Jews. The social structure of religion often has elements of hypocrisy in it and is older than civilization itself. The influence of religion on society is so powerful that theocracies continue to exist to this day. One of Joshua's missions during his ministry is to reduce the amount of regulation that religion enforces upon society. He works on the Sabbath, eats bacon and forgives sins.

Style

Point of View

Biff has two points of view, his modern self who writes in the hotel room and his ancient self, whom he remembers through his gospel. Whether Biff's memories are strictly accurate is up to conjecture. No memoir is ever strictly accurate, having been colored over time.

At first, the modern world frightens and confuses both the angel and Biff. The angel, not understanding how fiction works, takes soap operas seriously. Biff tries to explain fiction to Raziel, but the lack of free will in angels thwarts his efforts. Angels cannot lie and so fiction is a meaningless concept.

Biff relates Joshua's point of view as best he can through conversations and observations. Joshua knows he is the Messiah but has no idea what this means in his youth. Biff supposes that being in such a position makes Joshua feel lonely much of the time, like the last yeti on the mountain near Gaspar's monastery.

The gospel according to Biff brings point of view to the bottom of the cross and shows how a spear finally kills Joshua and some of the things he says before death. The Roman soldiers gain perspective and the hanging death of Judas becomes a murder, not suicide.

Setting

The settings of the story follow the heroic novel structure. The hero, Joshua, must leave the familiar surroundings of Nazareth to go out and do heroic things before returning to his home turf. He experiences the mysterious fortress of Balthesar's in Persia, the monastery of Gaspar's in China and the mean cliff notch of Melchior's in India.

The travels bring Biff and Joshua to internal settings as well. Joshua experiences full enlightenment and finally understands what it means to be the Messiah. Biff learns kung fu and becomes a formidable warrior. They both love Maggie and she loves them, and in the end, Biff completely blows his karma by murdering and committing suicide.

The setting moves from intimate conversations within walls to grand sweeping expanses of deserts, mountains, river valleys and the ocean. Something always moves in the settings. A caravan crosses the desert, monks carry food and tea to the yeti in the mountains, Kali demands blood in the river valley, and Biff rides his elephant near the ocean.

Language and Meaning

Heaven grants modern Biff the gift of tongues, meaning that he understands all languages. He writes in modern idiomatic American English, which immediately brings humor into the story. When Biff finishes reading the modern Gospels, he mocks the flowery and bombastic language to be found in the Bible.

The overall effect makes Lamb a readable story with humor that often extorts a loud guffaw that may not go over well in a public library. Yet serious meanings come through as well. Good humor must be based on truth, and Lamb brings out several truths about the Bible. The first and most obvious is that flowery and bombastic language does not tell a story very well. The language of the common person does much better to bring characters to life and to fill out scenes. Another truth is that Joshua is both divine and human, and that this poses unique problems in his life. A third truth is that humans have a Dickensian time following rules, especially those that involve not doing something like opening a door that releases a demon or eating a particular fruit in a garden. Finally, the truth that everyone has a different point of view for any one particular event comes through strongly. The Joshua that Biff knew is not the same Joshua described in the Bible.

Structure

The story is told in the classical heroic structure. The hero, Joshua, can develop only so far in his hometown. He must go out into the world and do heroic things, then return home to his rewards, or in this case, his destiny. Paralleling Joshua, Biff must get out of his restrictive society and expand. However, his heroic task is to write his gospel, an action that redeems him from the fatal sins of murder and suicide. He is granted a second chance at life and with the sweet reward of Maggie as his cohort in the high art of detecting and expressing the humor in life.

The first twenty-nine chapters are numbered, but the last six chapters are titled and follow the days of the week from Sunday to Friday. Most of the story moves along chronologically except for places where Joshua relates a recent past experience, such as what happened during an inquisition. Biff interleaves two evolving scenes during the fight with the demon in Balthesar's fortress, where the Magus feels the release of the demon and hurries back to the fortress with Joshua, the only one who can get rid of the demon.

The plot structure succeeds in pulling the reader along without sagging in the middle or causing confusion. Chapter transitions smoothen the way in a cinematographically manner, suggesting a future screenplay. Character development parallels this idea with a strong opening where Biff's body reforms from swirling dust and he moves through the modern world with the angel. Joshua's character makes major transformations quickly, and Maggie comes on as potential Oscar material.

The author provides a tear-jerking, feel-good closing in an epilog and an afterword that apologizes for any hurt feelings left in the reader. He also opens the book with a prayer:

"Author's blessing

"If you have come to these pages for laughter, may you find it.

"If you are here to be offended, may your ire rise and your blood boil.

"If you seek an adventure, may this story sing you away to blissful escape.

"If you need to test or confirm your beliefs, may you reach comfortable conclusions.

"All books reveal perfection, by what they are or what they are not.

"May you find that which you seek, in these pages or outside them.

"May you find perfection, and know it by name" (no page number).

These additions to the book help to avoid offending anyone and to encase the story within a tight capsule—this is fiction. It was created for fun. If the reader also learns something along the way, so be it.

Quotes

"I don't know if now, having lived and died the life of a man, I can write about little-boy love, but remembering it now, it seems the cleanest pain I've every known. Love without desire, or conditions, or limits—a pure and radiant glow in the heart that could make me giddy and sad and glorious all at once. Where does it go? Why, in all their experiments, did the Magi never try to capture the purity in a bottle? Perhaps it is lost to us when we become sexual creatures, and no magic can bring it back. Perhaps I only remember it because I spent so long trying to understand the love that Joshua felt for everyone" (p. 26).

"Well, if the village idiot named it, I'm sure it's a good thing." [Joshua]

'There you go, you got it.' [Biff]

'Got what?'

'Sarcasm.'

'No, I meant it.'

'Sure you did.'

'Is that sarcasm?'

'Irony, I think.'

'What's the difference?'

'I haven't the slightest idea.'

'So you're being ironic now, right?'

'No, I really don't know.'

'Maybe you should ask the idiot.'

'Now you've got it.'

'What?'

'Sarcasm'" (pp. 50-51).

"The city was like a huge cup that had been filled to its brim with pilgrims, then spilled into a seething pool of humanity around it. When we arrived men were already lined up as far as the Damascus gate, waiting with their lambs to get to the Temple. A greasy black smoke was on the wind, coming from the Temple, where as many as ten thousand priests would be slaughtering the lambs and burning the blood and fatty parts on the altar. Cooking fires were burning all around the city as women prepared the lambs. A haze hung in the air, the steam and funk of a million people and as many animals. Stale breath and sweat and the smell of piss rose in the heat of the day, mixing with the bleating of lambs, the bellowing of camels, the crying of children, the ululations of women, and the low buzz of too many voices, until the air was thick with sounds and smells and God and history. Here Abraham received the word of God that his people would be the Chosen, here were the Hebrews delivered out of Egypt, here Solomon built the first Temple, here walked the prophets and the kings of the Hebrews, and here resided the Ark of the Covenant. Jerusalem. Here did I, the Christ, and John the Baptist come to find out the will of God and, if we were lucky, spot some really delicious girls. (What, you thought it was all religion and philosophy?)" (p. 92).

"I turned in the water to see my friend waving to me from the stern of the becalmed ship. Beside him, Titus cowered like a frightened child. On the mast above them sat a winged figure, who after I swam to the ship and was hoisted out by a very frightened bunch of sailors, I recognized as the angel Raziel. Unlike the times when we had seen him before, he wore robes as black as pitch, and the feathers in his wings shone the blue-black of the sea under moonlight. As I joined Joshua on the raised poop deck at the stern of the ship, the angel took wing and gently landed on the deck beside us. Titus was shielding his head with his arms, as if to ward off an attacker, and he looked as if he were trying to dissolve between the deck boards" (p. 121).

"Mankind, I suppose, is designed to run on—to be motivated by—temptation. If progress is a virtue then this is our greatest gift. (For what is curiosity if not intellectual temptation? And what progress is there without curiosity?) On the other hand, can you call such a profound weakness a gift, or is a design flaw? Is temptation itself at fault for man's woes, or is it simply the lack of judgment in response to temptation? In other words, who is to blame? Mankind, or a bad designer? Because I can't help but think that if God had never told Adam and Eve to avoid the fruit of the tree of knowledge, that the human race would still be running around naked, dancing in wonderment and blissfully naming stuff between snacks, naps, and shags. By the same token, if Balthesar had passed that great ironclad door the first day without a word of warning, I might have never given it a second glance, and once again, much trouble could have been avoided. Am I to blame for what happened, or is it the author of temptation, God Hisownself?" (p. 148).

"Her eyes went wide like those of an excited child. Times like that I almost fell in love with her, but fortunately I was always distracted by Joy's sophistication, Pillow's maternal fussing, Number Six's dexterity, or any one of the other charms that were heaped upon me daily. I understood completely Balthesar's strategy to keep from falling in love with any one of them. Joshua's situation, on the other hand, was harder to figure, because he enjoyed spending time with the girls, trading stories from the Torah for legends of the storm dragons and the monkey king. He said that there was an innate kindness born in women that he'd never seen in a man, and he liked being around them. His strength in resisting their physical charms astounded me perhaps even more than the other miraculous things I'd seen him do over the years. I couldn't relate to the act of raising someone from the dead, but turning down a beautiful woman, that took courage beyond my understanding" (p.) 177.

"Sitting was what we did. To learn to sit, to be still and hear the music of the universe, was why we had come halfway around the world, evidently. To let go of ego, not individuality, but that which distinguishes us from all other beings. 'When you sit, sit. When you breathe, breathe. When you eat, eat,' Gaspar would say, meaning that every bit of our being was to be in the moment, completely aware of the now, no past, no future, nothing dividing us from everything that is.

"It's hard for me, a Jew, to stay in the moment. Without the past, where is the guilt? And without the future, where is the dread? And without guilt and dread, who am I?" (p. 219).



"Over the next few years Joshua spent at least a week out of every month in the mountains with the yeti, going up not only with every group after alms, but often going up into the mountains by himself for days or, in the summer, weeks at a time. He never talked about what he did while in the mountains, except, he told me, that the yeti had taken him to the cave where he lived and had shown him the bones of his people. My friend had found something with the yeti, and although I didn't have the courage to ask him, I suspect the bond he shared with the snowman was the knowledge that they were both unique creatures, nothing like either of them walked the face of the earth, and regardless of the connection each might feel with God and the universe, at that time, in that place, but for each other, they were utterly alone" (p. 246).

"'Ancient sacred wisdom,' she [Kashmir] said. 'The book was a gift from a patron. The Kama Sutra, It's called. Thread of Desire.'

'The Buddha said that desire is the source of all suffering,' I [Biff] said, feeling like the kung fu master that I knew I was.

'Do they look like they are suffering?'

'No.' I began to tremble. I had been too long out of the company of women. Far too long.

'Would you like to try that? That suffering. With me?'

'Yes,' I said. All the training, all the discipline, all the control, gone in a word.

'Do you have twenty rupees?'

'No.'

'Then suffer,' she said, and she stepped away.

'See, I told you'" (p. 289).

"No sooner did we pass into Galilee than we began to hear about what John the Baptist was doing in Judea.

'Hundreds have followed him into the desert,' we heard in Gischala.

'Some say he is the Messiah,' one man told us in Baca.

'Herod is afraid of him,' said a woman in Cana.

'He's another crazy holy man,' said a Roman soldier in Sepphoris. 'The Jews breed them like rabbits. I hear he drowns anyone who doesn't agree with him. First sensible idea I've heard since I was sent to this accursed territory'" (p. 309).

"I retreated to a corner where I saw Maggie's sister Martha watching as she nibbled at some bread with goat cheese. She was twenty-five, a shorter, sturdier version of Maggie, with the same auburn hair and blue eyes, but with less tendency to laugh. Her husband had divorced her for 'grievous skankage' and now she lived with her older brother Simon in Bethany" (p. 333).

"The Pharisees all looked like someone had dropped hot coals into their laps as the scream went on, and on. Maggie had great sustain. Before Jakan could get up to investigate, there cam my girl—still shrieking, I might add—a lovely green foam running out of her mouth, her dress torn and hanging in shreds on her blood-streaked body and blood running from the corners of her eyes. She screamed in Jakan's face and rolled

her eyes, then leapt onto the table and growled as she kicked every piece of crockery off onto the floor where it shattered. The servant girl ran through screaming, 'Demons have taken her, demons have taken her!' then bolted out the front door. Maggie started screeching again, then ran up and down the length of the table, urinating as she went. (Nice touch, I would never have thought of that)" (p. 357).

"Maggie and I made a nest of the cushions under the wide arched window in the front, so we could hear the slightest noise coming from the street, but as night started to fall, the footsteps became fewer and farther between, the distant singing from the Temple faded, and we settled into each other's arms, a single lump of low, agonizing grief. Sometime after dark we made love together for the first time since the night before Joshua and I left for the Orient. All those years had passed, and yet it seemed familiar. That first time, so long ago, making love was a desperate way to share the grief we felt because we were each about to lose someone we loved. This time we were losing the same person. This time, we slept afterward" (p. 419).

"The anger ran out of me then, leaving me feeling as if my very bones were losing their structure. I looked forward, straight over the Ben Hinnon valley, into a sheet of lightning-bleached rain. 'I'm sorry,' I said, and I stepped off the cliff. I felt a bolt of pain, and then nothing" (p. 435).

Topics for Discussion

List and describe five different humor techniques used in telling the story.

Compare and contrast Biff and Joshua.

Describe the character of Maggie.

Why is Joshua crucified instead of stoned to death?

What role do the Pharisees play in ancient Israel?

Summarize Bartholomew's philosophy.

How do the three Magi differ?

What threats to the status quo does Joshua present?

Create a cast of actors, living or dead, to play the major characters in Lamb.