

The Life of Jesus Christ: An Assessment

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The life of Jesus the Jew has generated myriad reactions and continues to far into the future. While some acknowledge that Jesus existed (e.g. Jewish historian Flavius Josephus; Pollock n.d: 9-11; Whiston 1998:p576) existed and walked the face of the earth, others are unsure with a third group claiming that He was simply a fictitious personality that was created over time, or a personality that was exaggerated to give a rather larger than life image of an ordinary philosophical Jew that traversed the earth sometime in the first century (Schweitzer 1910; McDowell 1998: p 566).

There is yet another group that deny claims about Him or His prophecies. They claim that the prophecies in the Old Testament either are pushed to mean what they were not intended to or point to someone else altogether! Further, they argue that Jesus' claims about Himself being the Son of God and the saviour of the world were simply claims by followers not from His mouth. If He indeed said them, then the words were certainly misunderstood and thus misinterpreted, for how could a mere mortal claim to be the Son of God? Muslims, the spurious gospels of Thomas & Barnabas, alongside the Jesus Seminar fall into this bracket (Jeffrey 1926; McDowell 1999: p 559-569; Cook 2000; Ruthven 2000; Riches 2000).

Despite all these debates, the fame and influence of Jesus continues to rise from age to age. He is probably the most well known character in History with far more followers than any other religion on the earth. It is therefore fitting for us to investigate or at best summarise the extant information about this man called Jesus. To achieve our objective, we summoned several sources though we drew heavily from the 48 paged book by the venerable Dr James Stalker giving a succinctly well written account. The beauty about this little but heavily loaded volume is that it traces the circumstances, context and time of the birth of Christ right through to the time He ascended to glory. We highlight some points that are critical for us to know.

The time and context in which the Christ was to be born is very interesting. It is interesting in the sense that the Romans reigned over Palestine and decreed a census to take place in one's native town. Joseph was pledged to be married to a virgin, Mary and thus required to relocate back to his native Bethlehem. If he

absconded, there was a heavy fine that would have been imposed on him so, he set out to the town with his new found bride who, though, was heavily pregnant. Joseph had received a revelation through an Angel which he obeyed and agreed to be the foster father of the young lad to be born.

At the Time, Palestine had a leadership structure from the Roman emperor Caesar (Augustus at this time) right down to Herod who was the Jewish King. The Jewish community had no option but to obey this decree but in the providence of God, things were working out to fulfil scripture.

The couple travelled to Bethlehem but did not find a place to lodge except in the stable. There Jesus was born and laid in a Manger, an unlikely place for a King, the Saviour of the world. But so it was, though the Shepherds came to pay homage to the child after their encounter with the Angelic host. Sometime later, the Maggi (most likely from Mesopotamia) came, saw the child and left using a different route from the one they had initially used. Jesus was presented at the Temple where Simeon and Anna saw the child pronouncing profound statements about Him. Shortly however, Joseph fled into Egypt with his wife and little child because Herod wanted to kill the boy King. He slaughtered all the children below 2 years in the hope that the Christ would be swept among the dead for He was the only legal King, anyone else spelt treason. Thankfully, Jesus was preserved and returned to Palestine with his parents after Herod Augustus had died. They settled in an obscure town of Nazereth where the little boy grew and developed.

Not much is said about Jesus from that age up to the time he begins His public Ministry except when He turned 12. At this time He went to Jerusalem with His parents but remained in the Temple discussing with the Doctors of the Law, whom he amazed, startledly puzzled with His wisdom and insight. In panic after realising that their son was not in the entourage back home, they journeyed back to Jerusalem only to find the boy Jesus in the Temple. Upon enquiring why He had done such a thing, Jesus simply responded that the parents should have known better-He was in His Father's house. How this sat with His parents is difficult to ascertain. His father Joseph phases out from the page of scripture from that point onwards. Perhaps he died some years later but that said, Jesus returned home with His parents and was obedient to them. He is said to have grown both in wisdom and favour with all. In those silent years in between, it is imagined that Jesus could have taken the trade of His earthly father, that of a carpenter (some suggest it was equivalent to some engineering trade) as often was the case in those days. He could have understudied Joseph, made furniture pieces and probably excelled in the trade.

However, a time came when he reached the age of thirty when the time of His ministry arrived. He went to and was baptised by John, His forerunner cousin. It would appear the two may have not physically met before but an indicator showed John (some claim that he was an ascetic hermit!...or even probably of the apocalyptic Essenes sect tacked away in the desert!) who the Christ was.

Having been baptised, Jesus went into the wilderness and fasted 40 days, in which time he received three temptations from the Devil. Despite being very subtle and tricky temptations, Jesus answered and repelled Satan with scripture. This was a real testing ground for the budding saviour. Jesus soon went into Cana for a Wedding and turned water into wine, this being His first public miracle. He went on to become a popular speaker, preacher and teacher. At first few knew Him or His mission but progressively He declared who He was as crowds continued to swell around Him, to the chagrin and Jealousy of the religious leaders (i.e. the Pharisees and Sadducees etc). Jesus was well aware of this and carefully executed His function while correcting age old scripture interpretive errors as He went along. At one time, even John's disciples were alarmed but this was soon allayed by their master who stated that the Christ had to increase while he decreased. While in Prison however, John would need an assurance whether Jesus was indeed the promised messiah which Jesus answered indirectly by the signs or miracles He performed. Jesus grew in influence to the extent that His enemies found it hard to apprehend Him and thus diligently searched for ways to pin Jesus down. Try as they might, *Yehushua* kept slipping through their grasp because His time had not come. On and on rose His fame with crowds ready to follow Him to obscure remote places if only they may hear words from His anointed lips. Christ spoke in parables, told stories, taught life giving principles, a watershed sermon and corrected wrong scriptural understanding, and that with great authority.

However, at some point, His popularity appears to have begun to wane when Jesus stated that He was the Bread of life to be eaten by men if they were to have eternal life. Sadly, one of his inner circle friends was to betray Him later. Christ, sensing that His time was near, instructed His disciples to prepare a meal during the Passover. As they had their meal, Judas left them heading to betray the Christ because Satan is said to have entered him. While Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane, Judas arrived with a crowd of armed people and arrested Jesus, who made no attempt to escape because His time had arrived. He was in custody of the Roman soldiers who pelted, insulted and mocked Him until Pilate presented Jesus before the charged Jews. They accused Him of blasphemy calling for His death. In exchange for Jesus, a criminal named Barabbas was set free while Jesus was sentenced to be crucified on the cross. Crucifixion was a slow, excruciatingly painful death and meant someone was cursed and the worst criminal in the Jewish mind. Although partially aided by Simon of Serene, Jesus carried His cross to Golgotha where He was crucified with a criminal on either side. That day was Friday, the preparation day for the Jew. It would have violated the Sabbath law if people remained on the cross and thus, they went on to break the "three" criminal's legs and in doing so, they would die quickly and be removed for burial. This was done for the first but when they came to Jesus, He was already dead and did not. They however broke the bones of the third and made ready to bury them. Jesus' body was taken down by Nicodemus and Simon ready for burial in a borrowed tomb. After spicing and wrapping in burial clothes, there Jesus' body lay. It is instructive to note here that

when Jesus cried "*It is finished*", darkness came over the land and the curtain in the Temple (Holy of Holies) was torn signifying that the new and living way was opened for all who would believe in the Saviour. The believer henceforth does not need the high priest to approach God. They can enter boldly into the throne room on account of Christ's sacrifice. They are Priests themselves.

Early on the first day of the week, Jesus rose from the dead in an unprecedented occurrence and went on to meet Mary, His disciples and many others. Over five hundred people saw Him alive proving that He was indeed the same Crucified Jesus. He told His disciples to go to a particular location to meet Him one final time.

Accordingly, Jesus appeared to them, pronounced a blessing and gave them a commission before he ascended to Heaven before their very eyes. Thus, the saviour's mission was ended.

If we were to survey His impact on humanity, words would fail us. As John has rightly pointed out, there is much that Jesus did that books could not possibly capture (John 20) but suffice it to say that He brought salvation to mankind. He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell believers and empower the saints in the cruel world. He has promised to return at a future date, this time as Judge and King rather than Saviour of the world. May this day be soon, *Maranatha!*

Conclusion

Jesus remains a towering figure in history and deeply into the future. He brought salvation to mankind for which all humans must be grateful. Despite human opposition and or attacks, Jesus cannot be ignored. The only reasonable response for mortals is to fly to him for salvation.

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