

Jesus of Nazareth

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Introduction

Jesus of Nazareth, commonly known as Jesus Christ, was born about 2000 years ago in the land of Israel. He lived for 33 ½ years in that land, mostly in the town of Nazareth, but during the last 3 ½, years of his life he went about Israel preaching "the good news about the kingdom of God", and healing many people by the miraculous power given him by God.

His preaching and life angered the Jewish authorities, and with the Romans they killed him by the painful process of crucifixion. He was buried, but three days later was brought back to life by God. Then forty days later he was taken by God to heaven to sit at God's right hand.

The Bible teaches that God will send him back to earth to rule the whole world as "*king of kings and lord of lords*" and complete the process of salvation for his people.

But exactly who is Jesus Christ? This booklet gives the Bible's answer to this question.

Tim Galbraith

Jesus is Unique

There is no doubt at all that The Bible presents Jesus Christ as an outstanding personality. He gives striking evidence of extraordinary powers in the miracles he performs; he makes the most penetrating observations about human life, and faith, and the true worship of God; and his claims concerning himself, as the only source of life to come, are claims no one else would dare to make.

His apostles speak of him, after he went to heaven, as exalted to all power and authority at God's right hand. And his own estimate of his vital significance is summed up in these words: "*This is life eternal, that they (mankind) might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent*" (John 17:3). Clearly, we need to know the truth about of Jesus Christ. The Bible says it is essential if we are to have any hope of a future life, and the Bible is the only message God has himself given us to tell us clearly who Jesus is.

What does the Bible say?

Before Jesus Christ appeared, the writings of the Old Testament (the first part of The Bible) taught man the truth about the one true God. "*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One*" (Deuteronomy 6:4) is the clear statement God gives after rescuing Israel from Egypt.

In the teaching of The Bible there is no compromise at all in this fundamental teaching of only one God who is the ultimate creative source of all life and death, the elements of nature and history and the power behind all forces, physical and spiritual. We are told that the name of this true God is Yahweh (Jehovah).

The Old Testament also gives many promises from God about a future world ruler whom God would provide and whom God calls "my son". In Psalm 2 we read: "*Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession*" (Psalm 2:7-8).

From this verse it is clear that God has appointed one who is to rule for Him over all the nations of the earth. He is called God's son, because God says he has "begotten" him (caused him to be born). This verse is referred to in the Bible in Acts 13:33, where we are told it is talking about Jesus.

In the Old Testament the birth of Jesus was also referred to in promises to Abraham and David. This is why the New Testament (the second part of The Bible) begins with the words: "*The book of the generation (or birth) of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham*" (Matthew 1:1).

The Origin of the Son

How Jesus came to exist is explained in simple terms in the Gospel of Luke. To Mary, a God-fearing virgin in Israel, herself a descendant of David the King, there appeared an angel with a very remarkable message: "*Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee... Thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David... and of his kingdom there shall be no end*" (Luke 1:28-33).

Let us pause for a moment to appreciate the shock of surprise and then exhilaration that these words would provoke in her. She knew quite well the promise made to David over 900 years before. A descendant (son) of David would be the long expected Messiah, and she was actually to be his mother. Her child was to reign on David's throne!

But then Mary was troubled. Although she was betrothed to a God-fearing Israelite named Joseph, they were not yet married, and there could be no question of a child being born until they were. How then, Mary asks the angel, can this promise come to pass? The angel is quite explicit in his reply: "*The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God*" (v. 35).

To complete the picture, Matthew's Gospel gives us the matter as it appeared to Joseph, her future husband. Before they were married, Mary "*was found with child of the Holy Spirit*". Joseph was naturally very worried about his promise to marry her. But an angel had a message for him from God: "*Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for it is he that shall save his people from their sins*" (Matthew 1:20-21, RV). From this Joseph would understand that this child was to be the Messiah.

These divine statements to Mary and Joseph contained the most momentous news. A child with a great destiny was to be born, for he would not only reign on David's throne for ever, but he would also "*save his people from their sins*". But the child's origin is made very clear. Mary is to be the mother, but Joseph is not to be the father. The child will be conceived because "*the power of the Highest*", God's power, will cause a miracle in Mary. And so "*a virgin shall conceive*" and her son shall be called "*the Son of God*". This is the clear Bible teaching of the birth of Jesus through a virgin called Mary.

Jesus, Son of Man

There is reluctance sometimes to accept the fact that Jesus, the Son of God, was fully a member of the human race. Some feel that to think of him as sharing our nature with all its weakness is to degrade him, and to throw doubt on his sinlessness. Here again we must turn to the evidence of the Bible.

We have seen already the clear record of his origin and his birth: son of God, but also son of Mary. The Bible says "*When the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law*" (Galatians 4:4, RV). "*Born under the law*" means that he was born under a law, God's law, which said that sinners must die. This law was first given to the first man Adam, and later made clearer in God's law to Israel through Moses. Jesus, descended from Adam and from Israel was therefore "born under the law".

The next verse tells us why this was necessary: "*that he might redeem them which were under the law*" (Galatians 5:5). Mankind, and the people of Israel in particular, lived under a law that condemned them because they could not keep it without sinning. Jesus was born as one of them, so that he could fully represent them in his work of saving them.

The Bible describes how Jesus had to be made "*perfect through sufferings*", so that he might be "*the author of salvation*" for those who are to be sons (and daughters) of God. For this reason "*he that sanctifieth (Jesus) and they that are sanctified (the faithful) are all of one*"; that is, are of the same nature. This is what he next declares, referring to the sons and daughters this time as "the children": "*Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise partook of the same*" (Hebrews 2:10-14). This tells us that the nature of Jesus was exactly the same as ours, "flesh and blood".

The writer goes on to tell us why this had to be: "*Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted*" (Hebrews 2:17-18).

Jesus, so that he could carry out his great work of sacrifice for sin, had to be of the same nature as those he came to save; and to be a merciful high priest, he had to experience the same temptations. The point is put equally clearly in Hebrews 4:15: "*For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, but one that has been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*"

There is, however, a great reluctance in some people to accept the idea that Jesus literally suffered all the temptations that we do. Some feel that to think of him as literally feeling temptation — that is, the urge to commit sin — is to defile him and to make him less than sinless. This, however, is a great mistake. There is a tremendous truth in the living experience and the death of Jesus, and to this we must now turn.

Why was the Son of God born like this?

What was God's purpose in bringing His son into the world in this way? The following statements from the Bible will make it clear:

"Thou shalt call his name Jesus : for it is he that shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

"God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us... For if, when we were enemies (that is, of God), we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Romans 5:8-10).

The clear message emerging from these sayings is that the work of Jesus, under the good hand of God his Father, was to be a sacrifice so that sin could be put away, men and women could be saved and reconciled to God. This is the great work of redemption in Christ. We need redemption; we need "saving", as the Bible puts it. For otherwise our situation is just as described in Ephesians 2:12: *"At that time you were without Christ... having no hope, and without God in the world"*. That is our situation — "having no hope", apart from the work of God through His son, Jesus Christ. *"Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).*

Why is he called Jesus "Christ"?

We have read that God gave him the name Jesus. The name "Christ" is not really a name, but a title. It is a Greek word and means the "anointed one", just like the Hebrew word "messiah". In the Old Testament. God's prophets, and priests and also kings, were all anointed as a sign of their authority to do the work appointed to them. Jesus is God's special prophet, and priest and king, so the title "Christ" is especially suitable for him. In Luke 2:11, God's messenger, announcing the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, called him "Christ".

The Vital Work of Jesus Christ

So we come to "the problem" which needed to be solved. Mankind cannot save itself from the consequences of sin, that is death. Yet God is *"not willing that any should perish"*: in fact He desires *"that all men should be saved"* (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4). Yet He cannot overlook sin, for that would be to abdicate His righteous authority in the world. So sin must be recognized, condemned, and conquered in such a way that men and women of earnest, sincere hearts can see the lesson, and acknowledge its truth for themselves. Men and women need a redeemer who can achieve in himself, and on their behalf, what they in their weakness are unable to do.

So God gave His only son, born by His power, yet fully a member of the human race. That son experienced all the temptations of humanity, because he is human, but firmly rejects them, and chooses to do, not his own will, but the will of the Father. It is vital for us to understand that Jesus made this decision entirely of his own will. He was not forced into it by God, or inevitably predisposed towards it by some pre-existent consciousness in heaven. As the Bible says: *"Thou hast loved*

righteousness, and hated iniquity: therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (Hebrews 1:9).

So, representing the human race, Christ conquered sin in that very nature, flesh and blood, where before it had triumphed: he reversed the original failure and, being himself sinless, was able to be offered as a sacrifice for sin. His death upon the cross was the atonement for human sin. Thus, God, having upheld His righteousness in condemning sin, could now in the abundance of His love and grace, extend forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with Himself to all those who will acknowledge His work in Christ.

Is Jesus equal to God?

How would Jesus answer this question? There can be no doubt about the answer he would give. Jesus always speaks of himself as under the Father, as dependent upon Him for all his teaching and all his works.

These are some of his own sayings:

"The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do..."(John 5:19).

"My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me" (John 7:16).

"My Father is greater than I..."(John 14:28).

When he is accused by the Jews of "making thyself God", he denies the charge and says, *"I am the son of God" (John 10:33-36)*. He even declines to allow himself to be called "good". When he is addressed as "good master", he replies: *"Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God" (Mark 10:18)*.

In his great prophecy uttered shortly before he was crucified, Jesus speaks of his own coming back to the earth .to reign: *"Then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory... But of that day or that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels that are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13:26,32)*.

When he has risen from the tomb, this is his message for the disciples: *"Go unto my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God" (John 20:19)*. There can be no doubt about the view held by Jesus himself: in everything the Father was superior; the Son was dependent upon Him.

Objection

Now it is sometimes objected that the passages we have quoted all refer to Jesus *"in the days of his flesh"*, as a man, and cannot be applied to him in his exalted state. Let us investigate what The Bible says. The time came when Jesus was raised from the dead; his mortal nature was changed to immortality; and he ascended to heaven, there to sit in the place of honor at the Father's right hand: *"He humbled himself,*

becoming obedient unto death... Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:8-11).

The exaltation of Jesus to a place of honor in heaven was the work of the Father. It is He who is to be glorified. All the decisive events in the life of Jesus are done by God the Father. It is God who has made Jesus "*both Lord and Christ*", and who has appointed him "*to be the Judge of living and dead*" (Acts 2:36; 10:42).

Many times the Bible refers to God and Jesus in their present relationship in heaven. This is how they do it: "*Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ*" (Romans 1:7). This precise wording is repeated in a number of the epistles. In Ephesians it is: "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . the God of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Ephesians 1:3,17). Whenever the allusion is to God and Jesus in heaven, they are always presented as two separate persons, and the priority is always given to the Father.

Of special interest is the Book of Revelation, given through the Apostle John. In it are instances of the risen and exalted Lord himself referring directly to his own relationship with God the Father. Notice how this revelation commences: "*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass...*" (Revelation 1:1). In the early chapters Jesus addresses directly "the seven churches which are in Asia" (v.4) and refers on a number of occasions to God his Father: "*He that overcometh . . . I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels*" (3:5; see also verses 12 and 21).

These are the words of Jesus himself; they were uttered about 60 years after he had ascended to heaven and taken his place of honor at the right hand of God. They describe therefore his relationship to God in his present glorified state. Their general sense is clear: it is God the Father who has supreme authority; it is He who gives the revelation to His Son; it is His throne that the Son shares; and it is He whom the Son acknowledges as "*my God*".

There is no suggestion of "co-equality" in these very significant pronouncements. But the most striking comment on the relative authority of God the Father and His Son is found in the Apostle Paul's description of the reign of Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28: "*Then cometh the end, when he (Christ) shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father.. And when all things have been subjected unto him (Christ), then shall the Son also himself be subjected to him (God), who did subject all things unto him (Christ), that God may be all in all*".

The right understanding of the relative authority of the Father and the Son could not be put more clearly: in the climax of the Father's purpose with the nations of the earth, the Son will hand back supreme authority to the Father.

Now let us soberly assess what this means. Jesus has at present been in heaven for nearly 2,000 years. He is to come back and reign on the earth for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:4). When at the end of this reign he hands over the Kingdom to the Father, the Son will have been glorified in immortality for about 3,000 years! Yet he

is then to hand over the Kingdom to the Father! The subordination of the glorified Son to God the Father could not be more clearly expressed. For it is God the Father who is, in the end, to be "all in all".

So, in summary, who is Jesus?

Jesus is the sinless son of the one true God, Yahweh. He is the only one God has given through whom we can have our sins forgiven. "*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.*" (1 Timothy 2:5). Through belief and baptism in him we can live in hope of being with him for ever when he returns to earth to give eternal life to his people and establish God's everlasting kingdom on earth.

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Questions to answer

1. Write out two separate verses from the Bible that clearly show who Jesus is.
2. Write down four differences between God and Jesus.
3. Where is Jesus now?
4. What does 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 teach us about the relationship between Jesus and his Father in eternity?

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