

# WHO WAS JESUS CHRIST?

BY

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MANY persons will consider the question one to which the Gospels give a sufficient answer, and that no further inquiry is necessary. But while the general Christian body affirm that Jesus was God incarnate on earth, the Unitarian Christians, less in numerical strength, but numbering a large proportion of the more intelligent and humane, absolutely deny his divinity; the Jews, of whom he is alleged to have been one, do not believe in him at all; and the enormous majority of the inhabitants of the earth have never accepted the Gospels. Even in the earliest ages of the Christian Church heretics were found, amongst Christians themselves, who denied that Jesus had ever existed in the flesh. Under these circumstances the most pious should concede that it is well to prosecute the inquiry to the uttermost, that their faith may rest on sure foundations. The history of Jesus Christ is contained in four books or gospels; outside these it cannot be pretended that there is any reliable narrative of his life. We know not with any certainty, and have now no means of knowing, when, where, or by whom these gospels were written. The name at the head of each gospel affords no clue to the real writer. Before A.D. 160, no author mentions any Gospels by Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, and there is no sufficient evidence to identify the Gospels we have with even the writings to which Irenæus refers towards the close of the second century. The Church has provided us with an author for each Gospel, and some early Fathers have argued that there ought to be four Gospels, because there are four seasons, four principal points to the compass, and four corners to the earth. Bolder speculators affirm twelve apostles because there are twelve signs of the Zodiac. With regard to the Gospel first in order, divines disagree as to the language in which it was written. Some allege that the original was in Hebrew, others deny that our Greek version has any of the characters of a translation.

We neither know the hour, nor day, nor month, nor year, of Jesus's birth; divines generally agree that he was not born on Christmas Day, and yet on that day the anniversary of his birth is observed. The Oxford Chronology places the matter in no clearer light, and more than thirty learned authorities give a period of over seven years' difference in their reckoning. The place of his birth is also uncertain. The Jews, in the presence of Jesus, reproached him that he ought to have been born at Bethlehem, and he never replied, "I was born there." (John vii, 41, 42, 52.)

Jesus was the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matthew i), from whom his descent is traced through Isaac — born of Sarai (whom the writer of the epistle to Galatians [iv, 24], says was a

covenant and not a woman) — and ultimately through Joseph, who was not only not his father, but is not shown to have had any kind of relationship to him, and through whom therefore the genealogy should not be traced. There are two genealogies in the Gospels which contradict each other, and these in part may be collated with the Old Testament genealogy, which differs from both. The genealogy of Matthew is self-contradictory, counts thirteen names as fourteen, and omits the names of three kings. Matthew says Abiud was the son of Zorobabel (i, 13). Luke says Zorobabel's son Was Rhesa (iii, 27). The Old Testament contradicts both, and gives Meshullam and Hananiah and Shelomith, their sister (1 Chron. iii, 19), as the names of Zorobabel's children. The reputed father of Jesus, Joseph, had two fathers, one named Jacob, the other Heli. The divines suggest that Heli was the father of Mary, by reading the word "Mary" in Luke iii, 23, in lieu of "Joseph," and the word "daughter" in lieu of "son," thus correcting the evident blunder made by inspiration. The birth of Jesus was miraculously announced to Mary and to Joseph by visits of an angel, but they so little regarded the miraculous annunciation that they marvelled soon after at much less wonderful things spoken by Simeon. Jesus was the son of God, or God manifest in the flesh, and his birth was first discovered by some wise men or astrologers, a class described in the Bible as an abomination in God's sight. These men saw *his* star in the East, but it did not tell them much, for they were apparently obliged to ask information from Herod the King. Herod in turn inquired of the chief priests and scribes; and it is evident Jeremiah was right if he said, "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means," for these chief priests either misread the prophets, or misquoted the scripture which is claimed to be a revelation from God, and invented a false prophecy (Matthew ii, 5, 6, *c.f.* (Micah v, 2), by omitting a few words from, and adding a few words to, a text until it suited their purpose. The star — after the wise men knew where to go, and no longer required its aid — led and went before them, until it came and stood over where the young child was. This story will be better understood if the reader will walk out some clear night, notice a star, and then try to fix the one house it will be exactly over. The writer of the Third Gospel, silent on the star story, speaks of an angel who tells some shepherds of the miraculous; but this does not appear to have happened in the reign of Herod. After the wise men had left Jesus, an angel warned Joseph to flee with Jesus and Mary into Egypt; and Joseph did fly, and remained there with the young child and his mother until the death of Herod; and this it is alleged was done to fulfil a prophecy. The words (Hosea xi, 1) are not prophetic and have no reference whatever to Jesus. The Jesus of the Third Gospel never went into Egypt at all in his childhood. When Jesus began to be about thirty

years of age, he was baptised by John in the River Jordan. John, who knew him, according to the First Gospel, forbade him directly he saw him; but, according to the Fourth Gospel, he knew him not, and had, therefore, no occasion to forbid him. God is an "invisible spirit," whom no man hath seen (John i, 18), or can see (Exodus xxxiii, 20); but the man John saw the spirit of God descending like a dove. God is everywhere, but at that time was in heaven, from whence he said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Although John heard this from God's own mouth, he did not always act as if he believed it, but some time after sent two of his disciples to Jesus to inquire if he were really the Christ (Matthew xi, 2, 3). Immediately after the baptism, Jesus was led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil. Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights, and in those days he did eat nothing. Moses twice fasted that period. Such fasts are nearly miraculous. The modern fasting men, and the Hindoo fasters, only show that under very abnormal conditions, long abstinence from food is possible. Absolutely miraculous events are events which never happened in the past, do not take place in the present, and never will occur in the future. Jesus, it is said, was God, and by his power as God fasted. On the hypothesis of his divinity, it is difficult to understand how he became hungry. When hungry the Devil tempted Jesus by offering him stones, and asking him to make them bread. Stones offered to a hungry man for bread-making hardly afford a probable temptation. Which temptation came next is a matter of doubt. Matthew and Luke relate the story in different order. According to one, the Devil next taketh Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and tempts him to throw himself to the bottom, by quoting Scripture that angels should bear him in their arms. Jesus either disbelieved this Scripture, or remembered that the Devil, like other pillars of the Church, grossly misquoted to suit his purpose, and the temptation failed. The Devil then took Jesus to an exceeding high mountain, from whence he showeth him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory thereof, in a moment of time. It is urged that this did not include a view of the antipodes, but only referred to the kingdoms then known; even then it must have been a long look from Judea to China. The mountain must have been very high — much higher than the diameter of the earth. Origen, a learned and pious holy father, suggests that no man in his senses will believe this to have really happened. If Origen had to defend his language before a modern judge of the type of Mr. Justice North, the Christian father would have sore risk of Holloway Gaol. The Devil offered Jesus — who it is declared was one with God, and therefore omnipotent — all the kingdoms of the world, if he, Jesus the omnipotent God, would fall down and worship his own creature the Devil. Some object that if God is the creator and omnipotent

ruler of the world, then the Devil would have no control over the kingdoms of the world, and that the offer could be no temptation, as it was made to Jesus, who was God omnipotent and all-wise. Such objectors rely on natural reason.

After the temptation Jesus worked many miracles, casting out devils and otherwise doing marvels amongst the inhabitants of Judea, who seem as a body to have been very unbelieving. If a second Jesus of Nazareth were in this heretical age to boast that he possessed the power of casting out devils, he would stand a fair chance of expiating his offence by a three months' imprisonment with hard labor. It is true that the 72nd Canon of the Church of England recognises that ministers can cast out devils, but forbids them to do this unless licensed by the Bishop "under pain of the imputation of imposture or cozenage." Now, if sick men have a little wisdom, the physician is resorted to that he may cure the disease. If men have much wisdom, they study physiology while they have health, in order to prevent sickness. In the time of the early Christians prayer and faith (James v, 14, 15) occupied the position since usurped by medicine and experience. Men who had lost their senses in the time of Christ were regarded as attacked not by disease but by the Devil. In the days of Jesus one spirit would make a man blind, or deaf, or dumb: occasionally a number of devils would get into a man and drive him mad. On one occasion Jesus met either one man (Mark v, 2) or two men (Matt. viii, 28), possessed with devils. The devils knew Jesus, and addressed him by name. Jesus, not so familiar with the imp or imps, inquired the name of the particular devil he was addressing. The answer, given in Latin, would induce a belief, possibly corroborated by the writings of the monks, that devils communicated in that tongue. Jesus wanted to cast out the devils from the man; this they did not contest, but they expressed a decided objection to being cast out of the country. A compromise was agreed to, and at their own request the devils were transferred to a herd of swine. The swine ran into the sea and were drowned. There is no record of any compensation to the owner.

Jesus fed large multitudes of people under circumstances of a most ultra-thaumaturgic character. To the first book of Euclid is prefixed an axiom "that the whole is greater than its part." John Wesley was wise if it be true that he eschewed mathematics lest it should lead him to infidelity. If any man be irreligious enough to accept Euclid's axiom, he will be compelled to reject the miraculous feeding of 5,000 people with five loaves and two small fishes. The original difficulty of the miracle, though not increased, is made hard to the common mind by the assertion that after the multitude had been fed, twelve basketsfull of fragments remained.

Jesus is related to have walked on the sea when it was very stormy, and when "the sea arose by reason of a great wind that

blew.” Walking on the water is a great feat even if the sea be calm, but when the waves run high it is still more wonderful.

The miracle of turning water into wine at Cana, in Galilee, is worthy attention, when considering the question, Who was Jesus Christ? Jesus and his disciples had been called to a marriage feast, and when there the company fell short of wine. The mother of Jesus, to whom the Catholics offer worship, and to whom they pay great adoration, informed Jesus of the deficiency, and was answered, “Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.” His mother seemed to have expected a miracle, yet in the Fourth Gospel the Cana wonder was the beginning of miracle working by Jesus; the apocryphal gospels assert that Jesus practised miracle working as a child. Jesus having obtained six waterpots full of water, turned them into wine. Teetotallers who cannot believe God would specially provide means of drunkenness, urge that this wine was not of intoxicating quality, though there is nothing in the text to justify their hypothesis. The curious connexion between the phrase “well drunk,” and the time at which the miracle was performed, would rather warrant the supposition that the guests were already in such a state as to render it difficult for them to critically appreciate the new vintage. The moral effects of this miracle are not easily appreciable.

Shortly after this Jesus went to the temple with a scourge of small cords, and drove thereout the cattle dealers and money changers who had assembled there in the ordinary course of their business. The writer of the Fourth Gospel places this event very early in the public life of Jesus. The writer of the Third Gospel fixes the occurrence much later.

Jesus being hungry went to a fig-tree, to gather figs, though the season of figs was not yet come. Of course there were no figs upon the tree, and Jesus then caused the tree to wither away. This is specially interesting as a problem for a true orthodox trinitarian who will believe — first, that Jesus was God, who made the tree, and prevented it from bearing figs; second, that God the all-wise, who is not subject to human passions, being hungry, went to the fig-tree, on which he knew there could be no figs, expecting to find some there; third, that God the all-just then punished the tree, because it did not bear figs in opposition to God’s eternal ordination.

Jesus had a disciple named Peter, who, having much Christian faith, was a great coward and denied his leader in his hour of need. Jesus though previously aware that Peter would be a traitor, yet gave him the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, and told him that whatsoever he bound on earth should be bound in Heaven. Peter was to have denied Jesus three times before the cock should crow (Matt. xxvi, 34). The cock crowed before Peter’s second denial (Mark xiv, 68). Commentators urge that the words used do

not refer to the crowing of any particular cock, but to a special hour of the morning called "cock-crow." But if the Gospel be true, the explanation is false. Peter's denial becomes the more extraordinary when we remember that he had seen Moses, Jesus, and Elias talking together, and had heard a voice from a cloud say, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." As Peter could thus deny Jesus after having heard God vouch his divinity, and Peter not only escapes punishment, but gets the office of gate-keeper to Heaven, how much more should those escape punishment and obtain reward, who only deny because they cannot help it, and who have been left without any corroborative evidence of sight or hearing?

The Jesus of the First Gospel promised that, as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so he (Jesus) would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Yet he was buried on Friday evening, and was out of the grave before Saturday night was over. Some say that the Jews reckoned part of a day as a whole one.

The translators have made Jesus perform a curious equestrian feat on his entry into Jerusalem. The text (Matt. xxi, 7) says they "brought the ass and the colt and put on them their clothes and set him thereon." This does not mean that he rode on both at one time; it only says so. On the cross the Jesus of the Four Gospels, who was God, cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" God cannot forsake himself. Jesus was God himself. Yet God forsook Jesus, and the latter cried out to know why he was forsaken. Any able divine will explain that of course he knew, and that he was not forsaken. The explanation renders it difficult to believe the dying cry, and the passage becomes one of the mysteries of the holy Christian religion, which, unless a man rightly believe, "without doubt he shall perish everlastingly." At the crucifixion of Jesus wonderful miracles took place "The graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose and came out of the grave after his resurrection and appeared unto many." Which saints were these? They "appeared unto many," but there is not the slightest evidence outside the Bible that anyone ever saw them. Their "bodies" came out of the graves. Do not the bodies of the saints decompose like those of ordinary human beings?

Jesus must have much changed in the grave, for his disciples did not know him when he stood on the shore (John xxi, 4), and Mary, most attached to him, knew him not, but supposed that he was the gardener. According to the First Gospel, Jesus appeared to two women after his resurrection, and afterwards met eleven of his disciples by appointment on a mountain in Galilee. When was this appointment made? The text on which divines rely is Matt. xxvi, 32; this makes no such appointment. According to the Second

Gospel, he appeared first to one woman, and when she told the disciples they did not believe it. Yet, on pain of indictment now and damnation hereafter, we are bound to unhesitatingly accept that which the disciples of Jesus rejected. By the Second Gospel we learn that instead of the eleven going to Galilee after Jesus, he came to them as they sat at meat. In the Third Gospel he first appeared to two of his disciples at Emmaus, and they did not know him until they had been a long time in his company – it was evening before they recognised him. Unfortunately, directly they knew him they did not see him, for as soon as they knew him he vanished out of their sight. He immediately afterwards appeared to the eleven at Jerusalem, and not at Galilee, as stated in the First Gospel. Jesus asked for some meat, and the disciples gave him a portion of a broiled fish and of a honeycomb, and he did eat. Jesus was afterwards taken up into Heaven, a cloud received him, and he was missed. God is everywhere, and Heaven no more above than below, but it is necessary we should believe that Jesus has ascended into Heaven to sit on the right hand of God, who is infinite and has no right hand. Was Jesus Christ a man? If limited for our answer to the mere Gospel Jesus – surely not. His whole career is, on any literal reading, simply a series of improbabilities or contradictions. Who was Christ? born of a virgin, and of divine parentage? So too were many of the mythic Sungods and so was Krishna, whose story, similar in many respects with that of Jesus, was current long prior to the Christian era.

Was Jesus Christ man or myth? His story being fable, is the hero a reality? That a man named Jesus really lived and performed some special actions attracting popular attention, and thus became the centre for a hundred myths may well be true, but beyond this what is there of solid fact?

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