

# Did Jesus Have Long Hair?

by The Ambassador College Graduate School of Theology

**W**E RECEIVE many letters about long hair. One man wrote, "I can't see where you get this idea about it being spiritually wrong to wear long hair!" (Jim C., Campaign, Ill.)

Another stated, ". . . I Corinthians 11:14 does not say Jesus wore short hair. It says, 'Why nature herself teaches you that long hair is a disgraceful thing for a man' (*Good News for Modern*

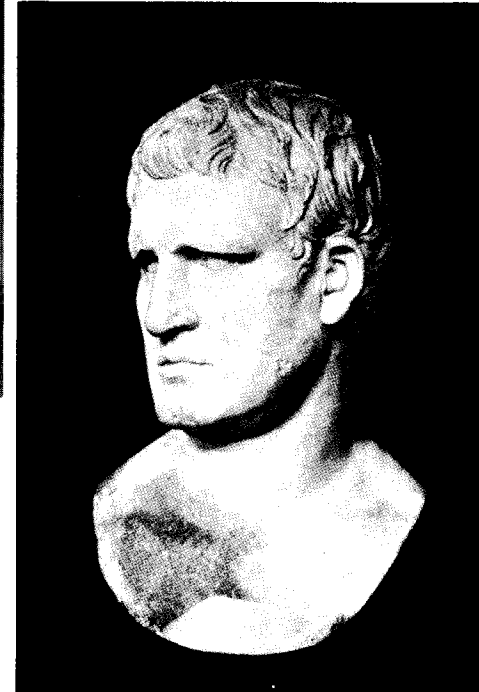
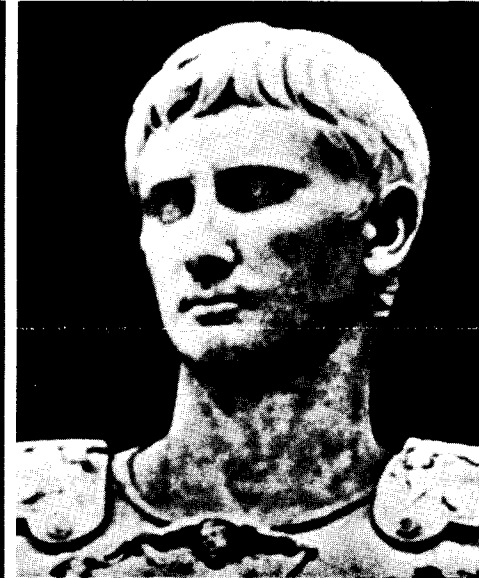
*Man*). It doesn't say, 'Jesus wore short hair.' *Nobody in that period of history did.* Short hair is only a product of the last 150 years" (Kelly S., Clemson, S. C.).

## The History of Short Hair

*But is this true?*

Short hair has been with us far longer than most realize. It was the dominant, accepted mode for men in

the time of Christ. Pick up any good, illustrated history book on the period and you will see the evidence before your eyes. Two good books in this area are: *A History of the Holy Land*, Michael Avi-Yonah, editor, and *Daniel to Paul*, Gaalyahu Cornfeld, editor. Now notice the busts and statues of various Greeks and Romans of the time of Christ. The men are wearing their hair short on every one of them in a



Roman emperors set the style for the entire empire before, during and after the time of Christ. Neither General Pompey (upper left) nor the Emperor Trajan (left) wore long hair, nor did Julius Caesar nor Caesar Augustus (upper right). King Herod Agrippa I of Judaea (lower right), a Jew by religion, ruled shortly after the time of Christ.

Photo credits: Upper left, University Prints; Lower left, Historical Pictures Service; Center, Ambassador College; Upper right, PIP; Lower right, University Prints, Boston

manner similar to that generally accepted today (minus the laurel wreath).

For example, on pages 126-7 of Avi-Yonah's work are found busts of Pompey, Augustus, and one believed to be Herod — all with short hair. All statues and carvings of Roman legionnaires show them with closely cropped hair. A Roman with long hair was an oddity as is . . . er . . . used to be the case for men in our society. In fact, *ALL* the Roman emperors before, during, and after the time of Christ, from Julius Caesar to Trajan, wore short hair. *And the emperor was the individual who set the pattern in style and mode of dress for the whole empire.*

Prior to the coming of the Romans, it was the Hellenistic Greek culture which dominated the Eastern Mediterranean, and Judaea by no means escaped. Even in Christ's day, a large segment of the Jewish population was Greek-speaking and Hellenistic in outlook. (See John 12:20; Acts 6:1.) The Greek Hellenistic style for men was to wear the hair short (Cornfeld, pp. 15, 146). On page 146 of *Daniel to Paul* is a picture of a "marble statuette of an unidentified man of the hellenistic period — a time of close contacts between the Jewish and hellenistic civilizations in thought, art, and everyday life. Whether Jewish or Gentile, he evokes his age and environment." The man had short hair. But notice that the author, a learned historian and archaeologist, *COULD NOT TELL* whether the man was Gentile or Jewish. Why? Because the styles of the day were the same throughout the Near-

Eastern region, and that included short hair!

What about the non-Hellenistic Jews? The Jewish *Talmud*, which is anti-Hellenistic, states that all priests should have their hair cut once every thirty days (Ta'anith 17a). These Jews were aware of the statement in Ezekiel 44:20: "Neither shall they shave their heads, nor suffer their locks to grow long."

Statues and other reproductions of the Jewish men from Christ's period are few because many Jews objected to them on religious grounds. But those few we do have again point to short hair as the style for men of the period (Cornfeld, p. 287).

#### Under a Nazarite Vow?

Some have mistakenly assumed that Christ was under a Nazarite vow. This was not the case. Jesus Christ came from *Nazareth*. The early Christians were sometimes called *Nazarenes*. But neither of these words has anything to do with a *Nazarite* vow. Notice that Jesus drank wine (Matt. 11:19). He also, on occasion, touched a dead body (Matt. 9:25). Both these actions were absolutely forbidden to anyone under a *Nazarite* vow (Num. 6:3, 6). Those under a *Nazarite* vow let their hair grow long as a token of *humiliation*. Today, those who wear their hair long are generally anything but humble. They wear long hair in *defiance* of society.

Notice too that as soon as the time period of the *Nazarite* vow was over, the one who undertook the vow was to shave his head! (Num. 6:18.) The

*shameful* period of the vow was over.

Now I Corinthians 11:14 becomes clear. "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?" It is A SHAME for a *man* to have long hair! Nature shows this. A man's hair is just not designed to grow long. For one thing, it is *not very manageable*.

#### What Christ Looked Like

We are nowhere told to be concerned with exactly what Jesus Christ looked like, *as a human being*. The Bible gives no exact description. But we are told, "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him" (Isa. 53:2).

Yet Jesus looked like any other normal Jew of His day! On a number of occasions He was able to pass through crowds because He looked just like anyone else (Luke 4:30; John 8:59; 10:39). Judas had to use a special sign, a kiss, to point out to Jesus' enemies which one He was. Judas would not have had to do this if Jesus had had long hair.

Write for our free reprint "Is It Wrong to Have Pictures of Christ?" if you want to know what Christ looks like *now*. You may be surprised! □

If you are not yet a subscriber to TOMORROW'S WORLD, a magazine of Biblical understanding published by The Ambassador College Graduate School of Theology, be sure to request a *free* subscription. It is sent as an educational service in the public interest. No charge.