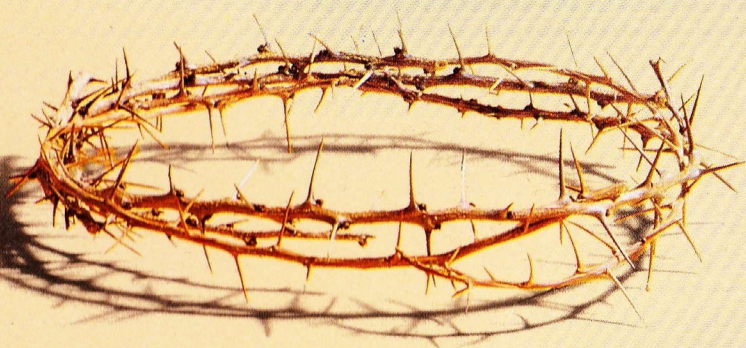


# Who Was Jesus?



# Who Was Jesus?

*Who was Jesus of Nazareth?  
Only a man? God in the flesh?  
Myth or fraud? Here's the fasci-  
nating story of the Man almost  
no one understands—yet  
whose message can change  
your life.*

**THIS BOOKLET IS NOT TO BE SOLD.**  
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# JESUS AS MAN AND GOD

**I**MAGINE YOURSELF A POLLSTER interviewing people about Jesus of Nazareth.

You want to know what Jesus means to them personally.

You would certainly run across these and other opinions:

“What do I think of Jesus? I don’t know. I don’t think about religion much.”

“I love Jesus. He changed my life. Helped me so much. He’s my heavenly Savior.”

“I don’t believe Jesus was God, if that’s what you mean. But he taught some great principles. If we followed them, the world would be a better place to live in.”

“If I believed what the Bible says of Jesus’ claims, I’d have to say he was a lunatic. Who can turn the other cheek?”

“I’m not a Christian. So I’m just going by what I’ve heard. Jesus certainly must have been a powerful personality. Misguided in some ways, perhaps. Certainly not a god.”

Who or what was Jesus anyway? Was he nothing more than a charismatic religious leader? Could he have been “God in the flesh?” Can we believe Jesus actually walked on water, made wine out of water or arose from the dead?

## **Jesus’ Impact on Humanity**

Whatever our opinion of Jesus, one thing is certain. As a result of just three and one-half years of preaching, Jesus

electrified and transformed the world. Over the centuries his teachings have changed millions of lives—for better or worse. Perhaps you're one who has felt his impact on your life.

Hundreds of millions profess to believe in him. Jesus' words have been used, misused and abused in the name of countless causes. But in spite of the magnetism of his personality, Jesus is an enigmatic figure. He is almost totally misunderstood in our time.

Jesus was equally misjudged during his own lifetime. Almost no one grasped who he was or what he was trying to get across. Not his followers, not his enemies, not his family, not his friends, not the masses.

### The Unknown Jesus

Jesus once took a poll among his followers. He asked, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" (Matt. 16:13, all scriptures from *The New King James Version*, unless otherwise noted).

Some thought Jesus was John the Baptist, who had been executed by King Herod, returned from the dead. Some said he was a second Elijah. Other people thought Jesus was a Jeremiah or one of the other ancient prophets.

One of his students, Peter, said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Yet Peter caught a glimpse of this truth for only a moment. He didn't really understand Jesus' true mission (see verses 21-23). Peter lapsed into believing that Jesus was a human Messiah—a physical descendant of David come to lead the Jewish nation to independence and glory.

That's what all of Jesus' disciples thought. Shortly after Jesus' execution one of them said, "We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). His unexpected death was a shock and disappointment.

The populace just wasn't sure about this man Jesus. "How long do You keep us in doubt?" they asked him. "If You are the Christ, tell us plainly" (John 10:24). Many people thought Jesus was less than completely sane. Some were saying, "He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?" (John 10:20). Even his physical family was concerned. "When His own people heard about this, they went out to lay

hold of Him, for they said, 'He is out of His mind' " (Mark 3:21).

Yet, Jesus drew vast crowds of common people. There was something special—a charisma, a power about his person and teaching. The populace hung on his words (Luke 19:48). Jealous religious leaders complained, "Look, the world has gone after Him!" (John 12:19).

Even the Roman official, Pontius Pilate, wondered about Jesus. The Jews had accused Jesus in front of Pilate. They said he claimed to be the Son of God. "When Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid... and said to Jesus, 'Where are You from?'" (John 19:7-9). Jesus' disciples also wondered what kind of a man he was. "Who can this be...?" they asked (Matt. 8:27).

*The name of Jesus is indeed idolized by millions. Yet, what he taught is seldom understood or followed.*

The people were certainly confused about the person of Jesus. They were even more befuddled about what he said. "The people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:28-29). "We have seen strange things today!" they'd often say (Luke 5:26). The educated were also shocked at Jesus' depth of learning. "How does this Man know letters, having never studied?" they asked (John 7:15).

Jesus was not perceived as an intellectual, a political leader of note or an established religious guru. He burst upon the world of his day seemingly out of nowhere. "We know that God spoke to Moses," the religious fraternity mocked, "as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from" (John 9:29).

Even Jesus' closest circle of followers didn't fully grasp why he came into the world. He even told them plainly he must die very shortly. "For He taught His disciples... 'The Son of Man is being delivered into the hands of men, and

they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day' ” (Mark 9:31). The disciples had no idea what he meant by this statement. “But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him” (verse 32).

Why is he talking about being tortured and killed? his disciples wondered. It bothered them greatly. On one occasion, Peter grabbed Jesus and took him aside. “This shall not happen to You!” Peter said in no uncertain terms (Matt. 16:22).

### **A Mystery to the Public**

The populace at large had even less idea than the disciples as to what this man's teachings were all about.

Jesus was an interesting speaker. When he preached to the multitudes Jesus used a narrative form of delivery—graphic stories to illustrate his points. The stories sounded good, that's true. However, the spiritual meaning of these parables had to be explained separately.

That's what caused the difficulty for his hearers. Jesus only decoded the stories among his inner circle of followers. “And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples” (Mark 4:34). He purposely allowed himself to be misunderstood by the masses (Matt. 13:10-11). Some said he was a good man. Others swore he was a charlatan and fraud—conning his hearers (John 7:12). Still others thought he was a religious crackpot. Some said he was of Satan. There were those who claimed Jesus had a drinking and gluttony problem (Matt. 11:19).

Upstanding members of the religious community were repelled by the company he kept. On one occasion a “woman in the city who was a sinner” poured oil on Jesus' feet, wiped them with her hair and even kissed his feet. How appalling it must have seemed. A “sinner” or woman of ill repute grasping the Master's feet. The Pharisees said, “This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him” (Luke 7:36-39).

Many said he was preparing to take over the government. In fact, at one point a crowd was about to force Jesus to declare himself king (John 6:15). At Jesus' trial, the religious community cried out, “We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying



that He Himself is Christ, a King" (Luke 23:2). It was a falsehood, of course. But many in the community thought Jesus' secret ambition was to take over the government.

Jesus was also worshiped—by people who didn't do what he said. That's the most incredible irony of all.

"Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?" Jesus asked the assembled multitude (Luke 6:46). He added the warning, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matt. 7:21).

People erroneously assumed he meant to throw out the basic laws of his nation's 15 century-old constitution. It's a common misunderstanding even today. "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets . . ." Jesus said (Matt. 5:17). Not a single dotting of an *i* or crossing of a *t* would disappear from any law based on the Ten Commandments, he added (verse 18).

In fact, Jesus proceeded to tell the crowds that these same laws would, henceforth, become even more binding. Avoiding an evil act would no longer satisfy the law. A person was guilty if he or she simply *desired* to do evil.

Yet, the religious leaders falsely accused Jesus of breaking God's law. Actually, it was the accusers who really broke God's law. On one occasion Jesus told them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition" (Mark 7:9).

This irony continues to our day. Perhaps one quarter of the world claims Christ as its banner. The name of Jesus is indeed idolized by millions. Yet, what he taught is seldom understood or followed. People still worship Jesus as they want to, not as he said they should.

Yet, millions who live in Christian nations don't really care about Jesus. You can love Jesus, hate Jesus or leave Jesus. You can discount his teachings, but they refuse to go away. Why so? What was so unusual about Jesus' life and teaching? What has inspired such insistent belief and yet such total derision?

Jesus was totally different from any other seer, before or since. He made an astounding claim that few other religious leaders have even come close to making.

Muhammad said of himself that he was merely a *human* prophet of the one deity, Allah. Buddha claimed only that he found the way of release from the misery of the world, that he had discovered Enlightenment. Confucius sought to transmit the wisdom of ancient sages, nothing more.

Jesus had a very different message. He claimed to be more than just a human being. That's what incensed the religious leaders of his day. They tried to kill Jesus because he "said that God was His Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18).

The Jews said it was blasphemy. They tried to stone him. They even told Jesus why: "Because You, being a Man, make Yourself God" (John 10:33).

On one occasion, Jesus shocked his listeners. First, he told them he had been sent from heaven by his Father (John 6:38). He claimed to have the power to raise people from the grave (verse 40). Then Jesus likened himself to bread and wine. He said, with no explanation, that if a person ate his

body and drank his blood, he or she would live forever.

Many of his own disciples were repelled by such talk. "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" they said (John 6:60). At that time, many of his followers gave up on Jesus and quit his circle of believers.

This was all symbolic talk, of course. He had used an analogy. Jesus was saying that he represented everything necessary for salvation. First, he would give his life—

body and blood—for the sins of humanity. Then Jesus, after being resurrected from the dead, would live his life of obedience all over again in repentant humans through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Most of the people in Jesus' day couldn't understand or accept what appeared to be a wild religious theory. They'd

**W**hat did this man Jesus promise that impelled his followers to give up everything—sometimes even their lives—to follow him?

never heard anything so bizarre. The idea also seems strange to many people today. Some think Jesus' resurrection from the dead is one of a number of myths surrounding his life. That's why some want to "demythologize" Jesus.

Was the resurrection a pious fraud spun into the story of Jesus' life? Let's be serious. Would anyone die for something he or she knew to be a lie? What did this man Jesus promise that impelled his followers to give up everything—sometimes even their lives—to follow him?

### **Lives of Two Devoted Followers**

Saul—whom we later know as the apostle Paul—was a young, brilliant and rising star of Judaic theology. He was going places, as we say.

Paul was a Jewish missionary, a religious zealot. He hated Jesus and this new religion, which he considered a heresy. Paul vigorously persecuted the followers of Jesus, throwing them in jail and causing some to be killed.

Suddenly and remarkably Paul changed his beliefs. He threw away everything he had struggled for and achieved. Paul wrote, "I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:8).

Paul considered his past achievements as something to be thrown to the dogs. Why would he tear up his life to follow a religious fanatic's lost cause—a pathetic loser nailed to a tree?

Cephas was an ordinary fisherman. He, too, had his life transformed by Jesus. Renamed Peter, or "a little stone," he was commissioned to "catch men" and "feed the flock." In the years following Jesus' death and resurrection Peter fearlessly preached Jesus, suffering humiliation, beatings, imprisonment and ultimately death for his name. This was a very different Peter from the one we see during Jesus' ministry. The former Peter, while full of braggadocio, failed when the chips were down by denying Jesus.

Peter had certainly thought of Jesus as a strong leader—the promised son of David. He saw him as a kind

of political demigod who would lead the nation to glory.

Yes, Peter remembered that strange talk from the Master about being condemned to death, being flogged and crucified. But Jesus often seemed to say outlandish things. Luke the physician later wrote down the disciples' reaction to the thought of Jesus dying. "The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about" (Luke 18:34, *New International Version*).

### **Like a Lamb to the Slaughter**

Jesus allowed himself to be captured by a religiously motivated mob. The disciples' invincible leader was taken into custody without a struggle.

In plain view, Jesus was spit upon, cursed, shoved, punched, laughed at, insulted, whipped, beaten. He was branded a heretic. The religious leadership sentenced him to death.

Next, the Roman authorities scourged this would-be savior. Pontius Pilate, under political pressure, delivered him to the will of a frenzied mob. The executioners then carried out an extreme form of capital punishment—crucifixion. It was a public execution, shameful and disgraceful. Here was the King of the Jews powerless and dying on a splintery tree trunk.

Peter and the apostles saw it all, staring at the unbelievable spectacle. Here was a docile and beaten Jesus. Didn't he heal the sick? Turn water into wine? Walk on water? Still the raging storm? *Why this?* How crushing and humiliating it all must have seemed to the disciples. They had dared to dream of glory. All they now possessed was a legacy of shame. People would laugh. There goes Peter, John, James. They gave up everything for naught. Jesus had been a fake, a fraud, a bogus messiah.

Peter had timidly followed Jesus the night before the execution. The boyish exuberance was already knocked out of him. There was nothing left to fight for. Onlookers asked Peter if he was a follower of that half-naked, bruised, disheveled, tired and very vulnerable human—that man called Jesus.

Peter cursed and swore, shouting out "I do not know this Man of whom you speak!" (Mark 14:71).

"I do not know what you are saying . . . I do not know the Man!" (Matt. 26:70,74).

Suddenly, the rooster crowed as Jesus said it would. At the sound, Jesus' eyes swept the courtyard and met Peter's (Luke 22:61). Peter ran away in humiliation and fear. And so did the rest of the disciples. One young man, probably Mark, was so frightened that he bolted away naked, leaving his clothing in the hands of those who tried to grab him (Mark 14:51). Yet, this same Mark later became a valued and trusted minister in service to God's Church.

### **A Sudden Change of Heart**

Less than two months after the crucifixion, Peter himself was a totally changed man—fully dedicated to Jesus.

On the annual day of Pentecost, he boldly began preaching to the crowd: "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it" (Acts 2:22-24).

Peter then warned the assembled multitude, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Peter spoke with such power and conviction that his listeners were "cut to the heart" (verse 37). That very day, 3,000 individuals determined to follow Jesus' way of life and were baptized.

The religious authorities were upset by this show of spiritual power. They threatened Peter and the other apostles. "Don't mention this man's name ever again," they demanded. These same authorities had been responsible for Jesus' death. Peter knew he was one sentence away from the same fate.

But Peter and the disciples boldly answered these reli-

gious authorities: "We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. *And we are His witnesses to these things*" (Acts 5:29-32, emphasis added).

What transformed these men in just a few short weeks? What shocking event had they witnessed? They had seen Jesus killed. They knew he was dead. Then they saw Jesus after his resurrection and they knew he was the Son of the living God.

The disciples had heard Jesus tell them he would die and live again. *And then both events happened.* That's what the disciples experienced. Nothing like this had ever happened before. Yet it did happen—to them. They saw it and lived through the event. There was no denying the fact.

Jesus had also promised they would have the Holy Spirit and that it would teach them all things, guiding them into all truth (John 14:26; 16:13). That's why the disciples now grasped God's real purpose for humanity and for them.

### **Most Important Event of History**

The disciples now perceived very important reasons for Jesus' life and death: *to reconcile humans to God, to enable him to live in repentant humans through the Holy Spirit and to make possible the resurrection of the dead* (Rom. 5:9-10).

Jesus had told the disciples during his ministry: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:25). But the concept meant nothing until they had seen Jesus die and then live again.

That's what helped change the apostles. That reality caused Paul to give up everything for the name of Christ. Paul now had one aim in life: "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection . . . if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:10-11).

Of course, the reader hasn't seen a dead Jesus risen from the grave. So he or she might still ask if the event really took place. Perhaps the disciples fabricated this tale to create a

following? Think what this would mean. If the resurrection did not take place, the disciples surely would have known that fact. *Therefore, they were willing to die for a tale they knew was a lie.* That doesn't make sense. We might be deceived about a belief and give our money, our time, perhaps our life for it. But if we knew it was a lie? Would we then suffer humiliation, beatings, torture, the loss of all things and death for it? Certainly not. What would be the point?

Only one conclusion is possible. The disciples did experience the most *unbelievable* sight of all: They had seen a dead man live again. They are our witnesses that this singular event—the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth—did take place.

Luke spoke of those “who from the beginning were eyewitnesses” (Luke 1:2).

Peter said, “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables . . . but were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (II Pet. 1:16).

John said decades after the fact, “We have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us” (I John 1:2).

Paul said, “Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord” (I Cor. 9:1). Paul saw the risen Christ some years later, “as by one born out of due time” (I Cor. 15:8).

Jesus himself told the disciples to spread the word about his life, death and resurrection. Before his death, Jesus said, “And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning” (John 15:27). The risen Christ told them, “And you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Throughout his Christian life, the apostle Paul stressed something the New Testament calls the “gospel” or good news.

*The disciples had heard Jesus tell them he would die and live again. And then both events happened.*

To Paul, the gospel centered around the meaning and importance of the resurrection—the dead inheriting *eternal* life. “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you . . . that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (I Cor. 15:3-4).

Paul staked his life on the fact of the resurrection. He was shocked to find that among the Christian believers in the city of Corinth, Greece, some had doubted the resurrection. Paul proceeded to give the church a long discourse on the logic of the dead being raised to life:

“If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain.

“Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up” (I Cor. 15:13-19).

Obviously, Paul would not have wasted his life on a lie. He and the other disciples knew Jesus had lived, had died and had been resurrected. When one accepts the Bible as the word of God, their testimony becomes the proof. The disciples have continued the job of witnessing to the resurrection down through the ages in their New Testament writings.

### **The Choices We Must Make**

True, you or I haven't seen Jesus made alive after death. But it's as though we actually did see him made alive. We see the resurrection through the eyes of those who witnessed it as we read their story. Those whom God is calling know their testimony is true because it was inspired by him (John 21:24).

If we accept that Peter, Paul, John, James, Jude, Luke, Mark and Matthew lived—if we accept their claim to be witnesses or chroniclers of Jesus' life, works and death—if we accept that they were inspired by God to write the material we call the New Testament—then we cannot deny the most important event in history until our time: Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead.

If we accept that Jesus died, then he must have been a mortal human like each of us. If we accept that Jesus was



resurrected to *immortal* life, we cannot deny that he must have been the Son of God. If we accept he was God in the flesh, then his promises—his commands—his instruction—his warnings—must be listened to.

We repeat: Jesus did not write a single word of New Testament scripture. Every word he spoke represents only what other men—his disciples—claim he said. And these men are a handful in number. Eight men only. These are the *only* writers who preserved facts about Jesus' life, his thoughts, his deeds, his death and his resurrection. There is no one else we can turn to.

Outside of this one compilation of books we call the New Testament, virtually nothing is known or recorded of Jesus by contemporary observers. Citations in other religious and secular writings of the times barely mention him. You can literally count the secular references to Jesus on your hands.

### Why Few Mentioned Jesus

It's not surprising that almost nothing was written and preserved of Jesus' ministry by contemporaries. He lived in a time when no mass media existed. No television. No newspapers or magazines. No photography. No printing. In fact, very little of anything from the ancient world has survived to our time.

Nazareth, the city in which Jesus was brought up, was an insignificant backwash of a village. It was not much more than a wide spot in the road with perhaps 500 to 2,000 people. And the village was off the beaten track. Main roads bypassed the tiny town. Jesus has been described as an itinerant preacher from an insignificant northern village.

Further, Jesus was a Jew living among Jews. At best, the Jews were considered oddities by the Greeks and Romans. At worst, they were ridiculed and persecuted. Further isolating Jesus is the fact that he lived until he was about age 30 in an area that even other Jews looked down on as being uncouth and uncultured. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" asked Nathanael, one of Jesus' future disciples (John 1:46).

Jesus' three and one-half years of preaching was confined to a few tetrarchies or provinces in the Holy Land such as

Galilee and Judea. At best, he would have been branded as the prophet of an obscure and strange cult.

Why would any "respectable" authority write about Jesus' teachings, especially when Jesus' misperceived original program appeared to have failed so utterly? After three and one-half years of preaching, almost all the "believers"

deserted him. Weeks after his death, rock-solid disciples could be counted only in the hundreds (Acts 1:15). Later, thousands of believers were added to a growing Church. But they were despised by Jews and ridiculed by mainstream Romans and Greeks.

The man Jesus himself became scorned by the scorned (the Jews). It's not surprising there's no first century inscription to Jesus or no mention of his name by

*O*utside the New Testament, virtually nothing is known or recorded of Jesus by contemporary observers.

his contemporaries. It's what we should expect.

Unless we believe what the men of the New Testament tell us, we can never hope to know what Jesus said, what he did and what he stood for. Nor can we fathom the fantastic gifts that he offered to the human race.

Should we believe? Should we really care whether Jesus was God, was a man, or was just a myth? Let's be honest. Most people don't really think about Jesus as they go about their daily business. Virtually the only time Jesus' name is on their lips is during a spate of profanity.

Oh, yes, the largest religion in the world arose "in his name." Christianity is supposedly based on Jesus' teachings. Religious people use the name of Christ. Millions profess to believe in him. Yet, most people don't know very much about Jesus or his teaching.

There's a good reason for this. Not many really study the Bible and very few even read it on a regular basis. Thus, Jesus of Nazareth, the most influential human being who has

ever lived, remains, as advertising executive Bruce Barton first called him in his 1925 bestseller, *The Man Nobody Knows*.

### That Teacher Called Jesus

We've seen why the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact. We have witnesses who gave their lives for that truth.

By virtue of his resurrection, Jesus proved that he was history's most unique and important personality. The resurrection is not the only event or act that sets Jesus apart. He accomplished what no human being was capable of doing. And all these things are attested to by the same witnesses.

Consider the qualifications of Jesus, who healed the sick (Matt. 4:23-24), forgave sins (Luke 5:17-26), walked on water (Matt. 14:22-33) stilled the raging wind and sea (Mark 4:35-41) raised people from the dead (John 11:38-44) changed water into wine (John 2:1-11) cast out demons (Mark 5:1-16) created bread and fish (Luke 9:10-17).

These extraordinary acts were all witnessed by observers who took pen in hand and wrote. As John said, "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:30-31).

The disciples staked their honor and their lives on the content of their writings. "This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24).

We have seen that Jesus was more than an ordinary human. His resurrection and what he did during his lifetime prove that. Jesus was born of Mary but begotten by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35)—thus, he was the Son of God. Through the resurrection he became the *ever-living* Son of God. Jesus himself was God. And he *is* God.

# JESUS BEFORE HIS HUMAN BIRTH

**W**HAT HAS JESUS CHRIST to do with us, today? To find out let's travel through time into the distant past—say 30,000,000,000 or more years ago. No humans existed then. Neither did our universe or the earth exist, as far as any mortal knows. Two eternal Spirit Beings were alive, however.

Who were these two beings? One was God, or *Theos* in the Greek. The other was “the Word,” or *Logos* in Greek. In his Gospel, John said they existed in an undefined time he called “the beginning.” Wrote John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1-2).

Whoever this Word was, he was *with* God and existed as a separate being. However, the Word was also God. An extraordinary thing happened to this Word. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . .” (John 1:14). A member of the God family was actually transformed into human flesh.

## Before the World Was

This eternal Word became the man Jesus of Nazareth. On earth, Jesus called himself the Son of God (John 10:36), as well as the Son of Man. The reason is he had become God's Son by birth. Later he became “the firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18).

But Jesus had existed throughout eternity as the ever-living Word. John said of Jesus, we “declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us” (I John 1:2).

John opened this letter to the Church by referring to “the beginning,” as he had in the Gospel. He said Jesus was that being “which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled . . .” (I John 1:1). John said he bore witness to that eternal life, the Word. That Word was Jesus Christ.

The member of the God family who became Jesus of Nazareth referred to himself as “one who exists.” He told the Jews, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58). In Revelation, the risen Jesus said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End . . . who is and who was and who is to come” (Rev. 1:8).

Jesus clearly was God. But Jesus was also a man. Thus, the unfathomable had happened: God was transformed into a perishable human being. Paul said of Jesus: “Being in very nature God . . . made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Phil. 2:6-8, NIV).

Jesus, as we’ll see, lived a perfect life and paid the penalty for all human sin—past, present and future. God the Father then resurrected Jesus to the eternal life he had possessed as the Word. Shortly before his crucifixion Jesus prayed, “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (John 17:5). And, indeed, that’s exactly what happened.

The Word (Jesus) and God (the Father) had a very special relationship of love throughout eternity. Jesus said of God, “You loved Me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24). They were completely one in spirit. “I and My Father are one,” said Jesus (John 10:30).

He obviously didn’t mean they were one being. They were two separate personalities who thought as one. The Word and God were one in cooperation, in thought, in deed, in philosophy. Though they were two distinct individuals

they acted in such concert that it was proper to say they were one—a singularity.

Paul said the Word was “the express image of” the person of God the Father (Heb. 1:3). Philip, one of Jesus’ disciples, asked him to reveal what the Father looked like. Jesus told him, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (John 14:9).

The Word and the Father are identical in character, in composition and general appearance while being separate, thinking beings. They have the same outlook, the same philosophy of life.

Jesus came to reveal the existence and character of the Father. The Father’s existence was not generally known to mankind until the Word appeared in the flesh. John wrote, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (John 1:18). Jesus himself had said, “And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form” (John 5:37).

### **Jesus’ Role in History**

The Word has been and is the chief executive officer over God’s plan on this earth. Let’s summarize the details of his office.

The God who became Jesus created all things. This God—the Word—was the God of the Old Testament. He was called YHWH (Yahweh) in Hebrew; Lord in English. This person—the Word—became Jesus the man. He lived a sinless life and paid for humanity’s sins. The Word was then resurrected to sit at God’s right hand.

He continues as the operations manager of all things that concern the human family. The Word will also return to earth as the Messiah. He will govern the nations of the world in the future.

Why is this member of the God family called the Word? Because he is the one who articulates. He speaks—authorizes—and it is done. As Spokesman, the Word is the one we see talking, working, acting in human history. But the Word is *not* the supreme authority.

In rank, Christ or the Word comes under God's authority. Jesus said, "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). Earlier Jesus admitted that he was merely his Father's messenger: "For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak" (John 12:49).

Thus the relationship of love between Jesus and God is predicated on *submission and obedience*, as well as loving rule. Christ and God cooperate in all things. There is no disagreement. They see eye to eye. Jesus (the Word) always submits in love to his Father.

The Father has total faith in the Son's obedience. The Word can be trusted with the responsibility of working with the creation—which includes God's astonishing purpose for the human family. "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth," said Jesus after his resurrection (Matt. 28:18).

It is the Word we always see in action. John tells us: "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3).

Paul said God "created all things through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:9). And again, "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible . . . All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist" (Col. 1:16-17).

What awesome power has been given to the Word! The Word created the universe. The Word created everything that exists on earth, including the human race itself. (Gen. 2:7).

The Word is the "Lord God" of the Bible. The title "Lord God" identifies which member of the God family does the actual creating. It is the *Lord* of the *God* family. YHWH (Yahweh)

*The unfathomable had happened: God was transformed into a perishable human being.*

or the Lord in almost every case refers to the Word—the Creator and later Jesus.

The term “Lord God” is used in Genesis as soon as the God family begins speaking to humans (Gen. 2:16). This specifies which member of the Godhead is doing the talking. Once identified, the Word is simply called “Lord” (Gen. 7:1). But the creation is not the Word’s idea alone. In Genesis 1 the term “God” or *Elohim* is used. This noun is plural in form and may have a plural or singular meaning depending on the context. *Elohim*, in Genesis 1, denotes more than one member involved in conversation. “Then God [*Elohim*] said, ‘Let *Us* make man in *Our* image, according to *Our* likeness . . .’” (Gen. 1:26, emphasis added).

The God family—consisting of God and the Word—decided upon the master plan of creating the human family. The Word did the actual creating, however. Once man is on earth, it is YHWH (Yahweh) or the Word who deals with the human race. He speaks to the world. “The Lord said to Cain . . .” (Gen. 4:9), “. . . to Noah” (Gen. 7:1), “. . . to Abram” (Gen. 12:1), “. . . to Moses” (Ex. 9:13)—and so on.

### The Mystery of the Ages

The Word’s most critical responsibility was to be changed into the human man, Jesus. The decision to send the Word into the world as a sacrifice could not have been made lightly nor without the most careful planning by the Father.

The Word, as Jesus, was at great risk on this earth. Consider what might have happened had Jesus failed to live a sinless life. What would have happened to the *Logos*? To the human race without a Savior?

Jesus, of course, succeeded. “Be of good cheer,” he said, “I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Paul tells us Jesus “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Having accomplished this feat, the Word was entrusted with overseeing those who would become part of God’s family on earth. “He is the head of the body, the church,” Paul wrote of the Word, the risen Jesus (Col. 1:18).

Finally, the Word is to return to create a new way of life on planet earth (Isa. 2:2-4). The Word will continue to deal



with the human race until the plan and purpose of God the Father are complete.

We have established that Jesus is the Word and is a member of the God family. We have seen that he has existed eternally and is working throughout human history. But we have emphasized, in a sense, the middle of the film. We see the Word as the Creator of all things. The Word created the human family. He worked with humans. The Logos was made flesh as Jesus of Nazareth. The Word died and was resurrected. He is building his congregation of faithful believers.

But what's the plan and purpose? Why the creation? Why the death of Jesus? Why the resurrection? Why the Church? What are we all about and how do we fit into the plan?

In order to understand, we must go back into the eternal past, to the same "in the beginning" before a universe existed. We arrive at the moment when God and the Word first mapped out the most awesome project in the history of eternity. That plan is something we call the "mystery of the ages."

### **Biggest Secret of All**

One day, during his earthly ministry, Jesus walked out of his house and sat by the Sea of Galilee. He began explaining to the people what God's government or kingdom was all about. Matthew said this was to fulfill a prophecy about Jesus, recorded centuries previously: "I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 13:35; Psa. 78:2).

What were those secrets? Paul said that Jesus' preaching had something to do with "the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began" (Rom. 16:25). What was this mystery?

This mystery—these secrets—ultimately had us, the human race, as its object. Paul said, "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained *before the ages* for our glory" (I Cor. 2:7, emphasis added). This mysterious plan was something "which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (I Cor. 2:8).

Paul then appealed to a statement the prophet Isaiah had written hundreds of years earlier. "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (I Cor. 2:9). Here was a blueprint, a design, a strategy that was so stupendous, so profound, no human could have fathomed it. Whatever this purpose was, it was prepared for a certain class of humans—those who love God. What was this plan? Who was involved?

Let's go back to "the beginning" once more. Let's imagine God and the Word talking together.

The two members of the God kingdom are discussing the most awesome concept that could ever be conceived. God and the Word are saying, "Let us re-create ourselves." To repeat: the plan was to make new members of the God family. That sounds almost bizarre—incomprehensible.

Yet, that is exactly what God and the Word set out to do. Their plan was to make beings having God's character and substance. These beings ultimately would be immortal, not subject to death.

*But they couldn't be mere clones or robots. They would have free moral agency. Yet they could not entertain motives of selfish ambition and competition. Somehow, God had to insure that these new beings would be willing to work with each other and with him in total harmony, peace and happiness—and do it forever. Competition, rebellion, cross*

*If Jesus had sinned just once during his physical life, he would have died—never to be resurrected to life.*

purposes, envy, hate could not exist.

The very thought that such a creation is possible seems preposterous to our human minds. Conflict, selfishness, competition is a way of life in the human family. How would God accomplish such a thing—create independent but like-thinking beings? How could God create "God" anyway? The an-

swer is that with God all things can be accomplished (Matt. 19:26).

God and the Word already knew it was possible for thinking beings to engage in acts the Bible calls "sin." We may liken God and the Word to airplane manufacturers who conceive that their plane could fail mechanically. They know it can happen. Obviously, they don't make it happen. But since they know it can happen, they take precautions to prevent a possible mechanical failure and crash.

### Sin and the Human Family

In the same way, God had to take precautions against sin rearing its ugly head within his kingdom.

What is "sin?" To "sin" is to miss the mark of God's perfect way of thinking and acting. "Sin is the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4, *Authorized or King James Version*). To sin is to engage in thoughts and activities that by their very nature are imperfect. Since God is perfect, to sin is to come in conflict with God and his way.

God needed to create beings who ultimately could not sin or deviate in any way from perfect thought and deed. He had to trust these created beings to will throughout eternity not to deviate from his way. Perhaps God could force them to obey. He could isolate sinning sons from the rest of his family. But what would be the point of that? Forced obedience is not what God was after. He wanted independent beings who *willingly submitted* to each other and to their God. How was God to accomplish such a Herculean task?

God and the Word decided to create these potential "human beings" in a mortal state, that is subject to decay and death. They made human bodies perishable for two reasons. First, any human who refused to live as God did, would eventually simply cease to exist. That human would be put out of his or her misery, so to speak, and not cause misery for others.

Second, potential God-beings had to realize their total dependence on God—that everything came from him and him alone. This attitude of thankfulness and submission had to be so ingrained that it would last throughout eternity. It would form an eternal love bond between the Creator and the poten-

tial new God-beings. Humans need to develop these elements of perfect character. This requires time and experience.

God knew he would have to allow something he absolutely hated. These mortal beings had to be given freedom to "sin," and live in a way contrary to God's way, if they so chose. They would learn through the consequences of their sins—the suffering sin causes—that God was right after all. Once human minds were enlightened, they would see that their own actions didn't produce the good they sought. The goal was for these humans to turn to their Creator in submission and love.

Now God couldn't simply erase sin. That is, for one who has sinned to merely say "I'm sorry" after sinning could not be enough. (People would soon catch on that God is "soft" on sin.) Sin had to have an irrevocable penalty which needed to somehow be paid.

Of course, God is certainly mercy and he is love. He does forgive sins. But God also needs to maintain justice. What is "justice"? Justice is the assigning of "rewards" in accordance with deeds done. A "punishment" is simply a reward for doing the wrong thing. It's not enough to say, "I'm sorry." God must preserve justice and a penalty for sin. Who can pay that penalty?

### The Question of Sin

There are consequences to what God calls "sin." Sin creates spiritual defects in or "injury" to the mind. Sinning humans are like *unfired* clay pots with defects. *They can and must be remolded.* Otherwise they remain worthless pots.

How did God the Father circumvent this "defective pot" dilemma? There was no avoiding sin in humans, actions which would make them spiritually defective. We've seen that. The penalty for those spiritual defects or sins is death. "The wages of sin is death . . ." Paul wrote (Rom. 6:23). All have sinned; all have incurred the death penalty.

But God's purpose is to keep the conscious mind alive—*forever* alive. How is this to be accomplished?

The plan for life called for the following. A member of the God family would be worth more than the sum total of all human life (because he was their Creator). After living a

perfect life in the flesh, he could pay the penalty for all sins, thus erasing *past* human defects (sins).

The Word volunteered for this vital job as the Savior and became Jesus the man. In fact, he bound himself to the task the moment he created Adam and Eve—the first humans. Only the Creator could eliminate the defects in his human pots and refashion them.

It was the Word's own decision to put his very existence at risk on this momentous undertaking. Jesus, the Word made flesh, told his listeners, "My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father" (John 10:17-18).

The wages, penalty or reward for sin was satisfied once Jesus died. As Paul said, "He made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us" (II Cor. 5:21). One problem still remained. The human pots could acquire new spiritual defects because of future sin. Jesus as the master spiritual potter had to create minds that strove to keep themselves free from future sin. That's exactly what he does today.

The apostle Paul saw this process working in his own life. "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

What is the end result of the forgiveness of sin and the refashioning of the human mind? "The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). Marred human minds are refashioned toward the perfection of God's way. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (II Cor. 5:17).

### **The Plan Summarized**

Let's outline this incredible plan once more in which Jesus Christ, the Word, is the central figure.

A physical universe and an earth especially suited to mortal beings had to be created. Then, beings—*human* beings—had to be created. They were given the choice of going

their own way, to form religious, social and political systems they thought best. These humans were free to defy God and his law. God had to allow all the human suffering that would result.

Next, a Savior had to be provided. The Word now had to risk being erased from existence. If Jesus had sinned just once during

his physical life, he would have died—never to be resurrected to life. Think of it. Just *one sin* would have sealed the Word's fate. Sending the Word into the world as a human being was an awesome executive decision for the Father.

There also had to be some way for humans to begin acquiring the mind, the thinking and the character of God. Finally, obedient and trusting humans would be transformed into very God by a resurrection. It was a

stupendous plan of incredible complexity and risk—a plan which had to be thoroughly and completely thought out.

The critical point was the Word being made flesh. The Word was to become humanity's perfect sacrifice. God would actually come down to live among human beings. He must be like other young men living among family and with neighbors. "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated 'God with us'" (Matt. 1:23).

Jesus died like a lamb led to the slaughter—something which the Word and the Father had planned for in some unknown past eternity. Peter wrote: "Knowing that you were . . . redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained *before* the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times" (I Pet. 1:18-20, emphasis added). John tells us Jesus was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8).

**T**he God family  
must allow human  
suffering—no matter  
how tragic it is.

God then sent the Holy Spirit to human minds willing to submit to God. This in turn led to the goal of God's plan: eternal life given to independent beings in his own family. Paul said man's hope rests in the resurrection. "... In hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began" (Tit. 1:2).

To those called of God and who obey, Jesus will say, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). The plan of the ages will then be finished. Human beings will have been born again as members of the God family.

Paul wrote: "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God . . . Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible" (I Cor. 15:50-52). Mortal humans will put on God's immortality.

This part of the plan is yet future. Mankind still lives in opposition to God. We see the consequences all around us—war, hate, perversion, fighting, competition, physical suffering, family problems, political strife.

### Sin and Suffering

God and the risen Jesus see the anguish striking the human family and have witnessed it throughout the ages. But they cannot intervene until God the Father determines the right time has come. *The God family must allow human suffering*—no matter how tragic it is. There is no other way.

Paul wrote, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us . . . . For the creation was subjected to futility, *not willingly*, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:18, 20-21, emphasis added).

Every human must learn that sin brings suffering and death. Sin often looks good, feels good to a person. It seems logical and right. When Eve stared at the forbidden fruit, it

seemed very attractive. It was “pleasant to the eyes” (Gen. 3:6).

What was wrong with eating the fruit? Simply that Adam and Eve were failing to submit themselves to God’s instruction. God now saw that Adam and Eve wouldn’t trust him as their guide through life. Adam and Eve believed in themselves, that they knew how to order their lives. They made themselves final arbiters of what is right or wrong. Suppose they had been made immortal in that state of mind. The possibility existed for them to become God’s adversaries, even as Lucifer became the devil or adversary, as we shall shortly see.

Only one option was open. The Eternal had to block man from becoming immortal in that state of mind. He said about man: “... Lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever—’ therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden...” (Gen. 3:22-23). Salvation and eternal life could not be granted to sinning minds that didn’t love, trust and obey God.

Sin can be summarized as lack of submission to God. In fact, love itself can be defined as submission. Every human must learn that he or she is nothing and that God is everything. If we want life we can only get it from God—his way. We must love God above anything we might desire, even our own lives.

That’s why Jesus said true love toward God was the greatest commandment. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind (Matt. 22:37). If a person has that attitude toward God, he or she is one with God. True love is the basis of faith and submission; nothing is more important.

### **Satan’s Rebellion**

Proof that being in submission to God’s perfect will is the only way to live once burst forth with roaring confirmation. A monstrous horror enveloped the universe before the creation of Adam and Eve.

It was a devastating rebellion in the heart of God’s spiritual kingdom. This uprising involved one third of all the unnumbered millions of beings called “angels,” whom God had created.



It underscored with utter finality that God's desire to create beings like himself—ones who could never sin because they had willed never to sin—was right on target. That's why today, the re-creating of human minds is the single most important task facing the God family.

The angels God created had not passed through the crucible of anything like human experience to prove their love for God. One of these angels is commonly known today as Lucifer. He was an incredibly powerful and intelligent being. After he was placed in charge of the earth, at its foundation, his mind was blinded by his own seeming omnipotence. Lucifer forgot he was God's creation, therefore inferior to him.

Lucifer ultimately challenged his Creator for the supreme position of rulership. This rebellious being was renamed based on his actions. He was now called Satan or the Adversary. He roared into the heavens with his angelic army, attempting a blitzkrieg victory over God. Satan greatly overestimated his own strength. In a titanic struggle, Satan was defeated and he was cast down to this earth.

Jesus, as the Word, standing next to God, witnessed this tragic rebellion. He told his disciples, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18).

The prophet Isaiah, under inspiration, also wrote of this time of crisis. "How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground. . . . For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High'" (Isa. 14:12-14).

Those "I wills . . ." were very heady boasts. Satan had become the archenemy of the God kingdom. He wanted to run the universe his way and hold the mantle of power. But the Creator is more powerful than the created. Satan lost the war and was thrown down to the earth where God had once given him an inheritance.

Satan refused to submit to God's loving rule. So did the angels who followed the adversary. They were spiritually reprobate and will have to be cast away.

God is able to turn every problem into an opportunity. He saw how Satan could be used to further his plan. With this in mind, the God family decided to create humans on the very planet where Satan was confined.

### Satan as Deceiver

It was clear that Satan would try to influence humans to follow him instead of God. Satan was, of course, restrained to whatever God allowed him to do. But he did give the devil space to influence human beings only as *they allowed* themselves to be influenced. What happened?

Consider the story of the first couple, Adam and Eve. Shortly after they were created, the serpent (Satan) influenced them to disobey God (Gen. 3). They willingly followed his teaching and sinned against their God.

God didn't force Adam and Eve to sin. But he must have had a notion that they wouldn't resist. Was God unjust? Certainly not. He instructed Adam and Eve to follow his commands implicitly. They were not in ignorance of what to do. They could have obeyed God. But they chose to follow Satan's bad advice because they *wanted to*. That was their decision.

That act began the downhill process for humanity. Paul wrote, "Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12). All people down through time have been just as spiritually weak as the first couple. Not one has had the desire and strength to obey God at all times under all circumstances. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" Paul wrote (Rom. 3:23).

Since all humans have sinned, all have incurred the death penalty because "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). The first Adam failed as have all humans. But Jesus, the second Adam, overcame the world and Satan. Jesus' spiritual accomplishments make it possible for humans, after repentance and conversion, to gain eternal life.

Satan doesn't have control of human minds. But most of humanity has been his willing captive. John wrote that "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (I John 5:19). He is called the dragon "that serpent of old, called the

Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” (Rev. 12:9).

One major reason for Jesus’ first coming was to qualify to take over Satan’s seat of authority. John wrote: “For the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (I John 3:8).

Jesus in human flesh bested the devil. “Away with you, Satan!” Jesus said, “For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve’” (Matt. 4:10). Jesus lived a perfect life—always obedient to his Father. He has qualified to be ruler in place of Satan. “Now is the judgment of this world,” Jesus told his disciples, “now the ruler of this world will be cast out” (John 12:31).

Jesus will replace Satan as ruler of earth at his Second Coming. Satan will then be chained. John saw that event in vision: “He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into a bottomless pit . . . so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished” (Rev. 20:2-3).

Most people do not realize that the God of the Old Testament—the Lord—is the one who became Jesus. We alluded to that fact earlier, showing that the Word, not God—the Father—dealt with the human race.

Jesus told his hearers that he was the “I AM” (John 8:58) or the ever-existing one. The mob that arrested Jesus said they were seeking Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus told them he was “I am” three times (John 18:5,6,8).

Moses asked of the God he saw in the burning bush, “What is His name?” He was told, “‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Ex. 3:13-14). This was the Lord (verse 7) or the

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Word and he said, "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (verse 6).

The Word led the children of Israel out of Egypt, guided them through 40 years of wandering in the wilderness and brought them into the Promised Land. Paul wrote, "Our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea. . . . For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, *and that Rock was Christ*" (I Cor. 10:1-4, emphasis added).

Several important things had to be accomplished between creation and the coming of the Word in the flesh as Jesus. One was the calling out of a physical nation of people to live according to God's laws. This is the story of the children of Israel in the Promised Land. Most people do not understand why the Lord chose this nation.

God needed to demonstrate to mankind that it was impossible for human beings to really serve him without his gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote of ancient Israel, "For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it" (Heb. 4:2).

### **Our Need for the Holy Spirit**

The lesson here is that God's goodness—not our own—leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). Without God's mind in us through the Holy Spirit we only have our own self-righteous goodness which is like filthy rags to God (Isa. 64:6).

Without the Holy Spirit, people have spiritual "veils" in front of them. They cannot see or comprehend spiritual truth. Paul said of God's own chosen people, Israel: "But their minds were hardened. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament" (II Cor. 3:14). That veil, Paul said, "is taken away in Christ" (verse 14).

More often, this darkened spiritual condition is called simply "blindness" (II Cor. 4:4), weakness of the flesh (Rom. 8:3) or hardening of the heart (Rom. 11:7). It reflects a lack of understanding or desire to make oneself completely follow and trust God in everything.

The God family wanted this weakness of the human mind written in history for all to read. Isaiah, reflecting the

thoughts of the Lord himself, said, "And there is no one who calls on Your name, who stirs himself up to take hold of You" (Isa. 64:7).

How complete this rejection was. It's staggering to realize that the Word—very God—came to the earth from time to time. Finally, he came as Jesus—called Immanuel or "God with us." God was *available* to the human family. Yet, virtually no one was interested.

### **Mystery of Melchizedek**

During one past time of human history—about 3,800 years ago—those wanting to obey God could approach the Word, who then called himself Melchizedek—the "King of righteousness" or "King of peace" (Heb. 7:2).

He then served as the priest or minister of God Most High to the human family. Paul said Melchizedek was "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God . . ." (Heb. 7:3). Clearly, this could only be said of God.

Few people were interested in learning God's way. One exception was Abraham, called by God to be the father of the faithful. "Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him [Abraham] . . ." (Gen. 14:18).

But the rest of the world—not called to understand—didn't grab hold of this opportunity to seek and learn about God's way. In time, Melchizedek chose to depart from the City of Peace. There arose a famine of the truth of God on earth.

The Word has been neglected by the human race in whatever form he has appeared or spoken. Last of all, he came as Jesus and men killed him (Matt. 21:37-39). But when God's plan is finished there will be no doubt of our complete dependence on the mercy, sacrifice and gift of Jesus. Every person will acknowledge the God who became Jesus or he or she will cease to exist.

As Paul wrote, "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,

and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11). That reality is yet future.

Before his coming as Jesus, the Word was also guiding the writing of Scripture. This was for the benefit of those future generations who would receive his Spirit and become obedient to his will. History itself thus becomes a kind of stage on which the Lord God walks. As he walks through time, he points out lessons the human race must learn.

Notice what Paul said about events through which the ancient nation of Israel lived: "Now these things became our examples . . . and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the age have come" (I Cor. 10:6-11). To the congregations of the Church of God at Rome, Paul said, "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning" (Rom. 15:4).

During these ancient times, the Word as the Lord God inspired his prophets, priests and holy men to write down those things which would serve as his instruction to mankind (II Pet. 1:20-21).

Many of these writings related to Jesus' suffering and death for humanity's sins (Isaiah 53). Others referred to the Word coming in a yet later time as the Messiah (Isa. 11).

Thus, the Word had many responsibilities to fulfill between creation and his appearance as the Savior. When all the details were in place and prepared, the most critical event in human history could take place. The Word was made flesh, lived among human beings, died and was resurrected. That's the subject of the next part of this booklet.

# JESUS AS SAVIOR AND KING

**C**ONSIDER HOW ASTONISHING Jesus' life on earth really was. Here was God actually transformed into a man. He walked among human beings. The Supreme Being looked into human eyes, talked to human ears. He worked, ate and drank with men and women. A divine, eternal spirit—the Creator and Ruler of the universe, the infinite Mind—touched human hands.

## God Living Among Humans

These happenings virtually defy human imagination. Yet they did occur only a short 2,000 years ago. Let's read Paul's summary of how the Word was transformed into Jesus, this time from the *New English Bible*:

“For the divine nature was his from the first; yet he did not think to snatch at equality with God, but made himself nothing, assuming the nature of a slave. Bearing the human likeness, revealed in human shape, he humbled himself, and in obedience accepted even death—death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6-8).

The Word literally emptied himself of divine God nature and became the man, Jesus Christ. He was born to a woman named Mary in a tiny Middle East village called Bethlehem (Matt. 2:1). God in the flesh was brought forth as a male baby. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a

manger because there was no room elsewhere at the inn (Luke 2:7).

The Word took on the same kind of flesh and blood body all humans possess (Heb. 2:14). Paul wrote, "When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal. 4:4). The Word became the human Jesus that he "might taste death for everyone" (Heb. 2:9).

Jesus had another great responsibility beyond dying for the world. He also had to *live* a perfect, sinless life for humanity. Jesus proved it was possible for humans with God's mind to also live in obedience to God. Paul wrote, "God . . . sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh . . . condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). For what reason? "That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us" (verse 4).

Jesus was a human being. He was not physically different from any of the multitudes of people who have lived or died. A spear in the heart would have killed him just like it would any other human. Jesus had to eat and drink to stay alive. He became tired and his feet got dirty walking on dusty roads. Pain hurt him just as much as it does any other human being.

Jesus had the Holy Spirit coupled to his own spirit or consciousness, that's true. Yet, even in this, Jesus was different only in the *amount* of that Spirit and when he received it (at conception). The same Spirit is available to those humans whom God calls, and who obey him (Acts 5:32). Paul wrote of Jesus: "In all things He had to be made like His brethren. . . . For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted" (Heb. 2:17-18).

### **The Only Perfect Human**

Jesus was like all other humans and yet different from every one. He faced the same temptations as every person who has lived. But he was the only person ever born who lived his entire life without a single sin.

What a staggering accomplishment! Paul wrote of the risen Jesus, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot



sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are *yet without sin*" (Heb. 4:15, emphasis added).

No other human has been able to avoid sin. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). That's what makes Jesus unique. It was Jesus' perfection in thought and deed that finally qualified him to be the Savior of the human race.

His death paid off humanity's debt of sin to God. How greatly Jesus suffered in accomplishing this feat! Jesus told his disciples, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is all accomplished!" (Luke 12:50.) During the night, just before he was taken prisoner, Jesus prayed in great agony. "Father, if it is Your will, remove this cup from Me." But immediately Jesus added, "Nevertheless not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

Why suffer such pain and distress—such a gruesome death? Why not a painless, quick death? For one reason alone: to underscore the enormity of sin and the supreme sacrifice made on our behalf. Paul said, "For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit" (I Cor. 6:20).

### **The Time of Suffering**

Jesus suffered greatly during his life. Tremendous pulls of the flesh tried to drag him into sin. Jesus resisted every temptation. Paul wrote that "in the days of his flesh, when He offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, [He] was heard because of His godly fear" (Heb. 5:7). Christ thus became the perfect Passover Lamb sacrificed for the sins of the human race (I Cor. 5:7).

As the Word, before his human birth, he inspired his prophet Isaiah to foretell the brutality he as Jesus would suffer: "His visage was marred more than any man . . . He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him . . . He was wounded for our transgressions . . . He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. . . . For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. . . . He was numbered with the

transgressors, and He bore the sin of many" (Isa. 52:14; 53:3, 5, 7, 8, 12).

The Word inspired dozens of such statements foretelling his own suffering and death in human form. They were written in the Hebrew Bible. These prophecies even included such details as soldiers casting lots for his clothes. (Compare Matthew 27:35-36 and Psalm 22:18.)

*J*esus was the only person ever born who lived his entire life without committing any sin.

The time finally came for Jesus' sacrifice, preordained before mankind even existed. Paul wrote, "Now, once at the end of the ages, he has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26). Jesus offered himself outside the city of Jerusalem almost 2,000 years ago. Thus was poured out "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"

(I Pet. 1:19). Jesus, who never sinned, was made sin for the human race (II Cor. 5:21).

God the Father watched the grim spectacle unfolding on this planet. His own son suffering abuse, struggling against sin, fighting Satan's evil influence. His Father waited in silence as Jesus was delivered to be beaten and crucified. He was certainly able to stop the madness. But preventing Jesus' death would have ruined God's eternal purpose.

"My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" cried Jesus before the instant of death (Matt. 27:46). At that point, Jesus had been made sin for humanity, uttering the statement he had inspired David to write many centuries previously (Ps. 22:1).

No man could have suffered more. But Jesus was willing. He had told the disciples, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). On another occasion Jesus told his listeners, "I lay down My life for the sheep" (John 10:15).

Peter wanted to fight in order to prevent Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. Jesus told Peter: "Put your sword in its place. . . . Do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and he will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?" (Matt. 26:52-54).

The plan of God had to move forward. God's purpose for the human race always took precedence. *Nothing could stop it*; neither grief, nor pain, not even a ghastly death. Even while in agony during his life, Jesus put the fate of the human race before his own needs. He prayed, seeing his own suffering looming on the horizon: "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour?' But for this purpose I came to this hour" (John 12:27).

In that context, John 3:16 takes on its true and profound meaning. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (see also Rom. 8:31-32).

Finally, the goal was reached late that Passover afternoon as the Son of Man hung on a stake—tired, bruised, in pain, bleeding. "It is finished," Jesus finally said as his blood was shed (John 19:30). "And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, 'Father, into your hands I commend My spirit.' And having said this, He breathed His last" (Luke 23:46). The Son of God died.

### **Our Spiritual Debt Wiped Out**

With his death, Jesus wiped out the spiritual note of debt—the penalty of sin—all humans had incurred.

Jesus' sacrifice made possible a connection between God and man. Paul told the Church at Colossae: "Having made peace through the blood of His cross . . . you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works . . . now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death" (Col. 1:20-22).

God could begin calling individuals out of sin. As they strove to submit to him in everything, God could apply Jesus' sacrifice to their lives. Thus, the prophecies of forgiveness would be fulfilled. "You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea" (Mic. 7:19). As ancient King Hezekiah said, "You

have cast all my sins behind Your back" (Isa. 38:17).

The "called out" individuals would become God's own "elect." Peter wrote to such people: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people. . . . Who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (I Pet. 2:9-10).

### **God's Timetable for Salvation**

An important point needs to be understood. Why hasn't everyone comprehended these truths? Why hasn't everyone had his or her chance for membership in God's spiritual kingdom? Are multitudes "lost," so to speak? The answer is, no.

Before the death and resurrection of Jesus, only a handful of individuals were chosen to fulfill special responsibilities. Their story is written in the Hebrew Bible. We're talking about such people as Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Deborah, Samuel, David, Isaiah, Esther. The uncounted millions who then lived were not yet given a chance for what the Bible calls "salvation."

What about the period of time between Jesus' resurrection and his future Second Coming? This can be called the "Church Age." During these centuries the God family has been calling only selected individuals to be part of the "elect."

These people are called the "remnant"—a small surviving group, a tiny portion of the total. Paul referred to this "elect" living in his day: "Even so then, at the present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace . . . the elect have obtained it, and the rest were hardened" (Rom. 11:5-7). To be "hardened" is simply to lack the Holy Spirit, a gift of God (Acts 2:38). God has purposed that at this time, only comparatively few individuals should be made part of his Church.

That will all change when the Word returns to this earth as the Messiah. He will remove the world's spiritual blindness and all people will have the opportunity to be saved.

The prophet Micah showed that the Messiah's world will be one of truth: "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be estab-

lished. . . . Many nations shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord. . . . He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion the law shall go forth" (Micah 4:1-5).

Isaiah also wrote of this wonderful time. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9).

God will then remove human hardness and blindness. Every single human alive will be offered the Holy Spirit: "Then I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God" (Ezek. 11:19-20).

What is to happen to all those who lived and died throughout the centuries until the Messiah's future return—those who weren't yet called? These individuals will be resurrected to physical life after God's kingdom has been on this earth for a thousand years. They will also be given God's Spirit and have an opportunity to receive eternal life (see Rev. 20:4, 11-12).

### **Resurrection Day**

But what happens to humans who have sought and obeyed God in this life? They are resurrected, if dead, or changed, if alive, into immortal beings at Jesus' return to this earth. Paul explained what will happen in a letter to the Church in the city of Thessalonica:

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (I Thess. 4:15-17).

Paul explained the resurrection to converted Christians at Corinth, Greece, in these terms: "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead will be raised

incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (I Cor. 15:51-52).

Salvation is really a four-part plan. First, God must choose a person to become a member of the "elect." Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44).

Second, God must apply Jesus' sacrifice to forgive the sins of a *repentant* person. Peter said, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19).

Third, Jesus must live his life of submission and love toward God all over again in the called-out person through the Holy Spirit. That person then strives to overcome his or her human nature in obedience to God. Paul explained it this way to the Christians at Ephesus: "Put off, concerning your former conduct, the *old man* which grows corrupt. . . . Put on the *new man* which was created according to God . . ." (Eph. 4:22-23, emphasis added).

Fourth, the "new person" who died with Christ by putting sin to death (Col. 2:20; 3:5-10) is, at Jesus' Second Coming, to be changed in composition to immortal spirit as a member of God's family.

The Word as the Creator—as Lord—as Jesus—as heavenly High Priest—as the returning Christ—is central to the entire process. The real hope of the human race is in the resurrection of Jesus and his life—a life he lives in repentant humans. Peter said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us . . . to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (I Pet. 1:3).

Paul said, "Having been justified [made right with God] by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (Rom. 5:9). We are reconciled to God by the death of his Son and we are then saved by Jesus' life. All through this process Jesus is the author and finisher of the way of life that leads to salvation (Heb. 12:2).

How does Jesus, who now sits at the right hand of his Father (Heb. 10:12), accomplish his saving work in humans? Jesus, of course, is the High Priest of those who have submitted their lives to God (Heb. 4:15). That is, he works with them in a pastoral sense to bring them to full spiritual

maturity in obedience and submission to the Eternal God.

Some have tried to deny this. John wrote: "For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist" (II John 7).

The Word "came or comes in the flesh" in two ways. First, a God—the Word—was actually made into a human being with human body and mind. That's Jesus, of course. Wrote John, "By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God" (I John 4:2). Second, he comes into the mind—that is "the flesh"—of a true believer. How does this happen?

We know Jesus does live in the true Christian's mind. Remember what Paul said: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20).

Jesus "living in the flesh" helps the true believer live a life of submission and obedience to God. The person now lives his life through a quality the Bible calls "faith." It is the faith *of* Jesus—his faith, his attitude of mind.

What is real living faith? Simply, that a human comes to believe God and does what he says. That is, he or she comes to live by every word of God. The individual does the spiritual works but they are done through the power of God. As James put it, "A man is justified by works,

and not faith only. . . . For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (Jas. 2:24-26).

Jesus explained to his disciples how he would live his life in the true believer. "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23).

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Jesus told the disciples he would send them a "Helper." Who or what is this Helper? Jesus explained. "But the Helper, *the Holy Spirit*, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things" (John 15:26, emphasis added). Jesus called the Helper "the Spirit of truth" and said it would guide them into all truth (John 16:13).

The Bible uses several metaphors and physical examples to describe this power of God. The Holy Spirit, for example, is something which can be poured out (Acts 2:17). It flows like water. Other symbols for the Holy Spirit are breath (John 20:22); oil (Ps. 45:7); wind (John 3:8); water (John 4:14) and sword (Eph. 6:17). Like the metaphor "Helper" these are merely human analogies used to help us understand something we cannot see nor fully grasp.

The Holy Spirit, for example, appeared in the form of a dove. John said of Jesus: "The heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him" (Matt. 3:16). This doesn't make the Holy Spirit a member of the bird family.

The Bible makes it quite clear what the Holy Spirit is. One example: Joseph, the husband of Mary, Jesus' mother, was told: "Do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for *that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit*. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:20-21, emphasis added).

Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Yet, Christ constantly called *God*, not the Holy Spirit, his father (John 17:1-3). The Holy Spirit, here, is the essence or power of God. If the Holy Spirit were a person, it would be Christ's Father. Here we clearly see that the Holy Spirit is the power of God, much as electricity is a power in the physical realm.

### **The Real Power Behind Jesus**

Today, the "Helper" or the Holy Spirit is the vehicle by which Jesus "comes in the flesh." Jesus uses the power of the Holy Spirit to assist humans submissive to God to live the same kind of life he did. It's the same power that begat the human Jesus and helped him remain sinless during his earthly life.



Paul prayed that the Church members would use that power and “be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man” (Eph. 3:16). He told Timothy, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (II Tim. 1:7). That’s why Paul was confident, saying, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).

Paul realized that as a human being he would not submit to God or his law. He said, “For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin” (Rom. 7:14).

He continued, showing that a real spiritual war rages within the called human being: “For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. . . . It is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. . . . O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (See Rom. 7:14-25.)

Who would save Paul? Jesus “coming in his flesh.” Paul said in conclusion, “I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Verse 25.) To keep God’s law requires the power of the Holy Spirit in those individuals who choose to obey God. The Spirit does not keep the law *for* a person or “in his stead.” It does so *through* the repentant individual.

What a strange, incomprehensible process it seems. It truly is a mystical puzzle to the average person. But it is now a riddle made clear. Through Jesus, we have a “revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began” (Rom. 16:25).

### When the Graves Open

The apostle Paul attained the certainty of a future resurrection through the power of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the risen Jesus as High Priest. At the end of his life, he said: “I have fought a good fight. I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (II Tim. 4:6-7).

Every individual called by God, dead or alive, is awaiting

the next most dramatic event in man's history: the return of the Word as the Messiah to this earth.

We've already seen that this will be the time of the resurrection in which the righteous dead will be made members of God's spiritual family. Jesus is the centerpiece of this great event. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:25).

It is Jesus as the Messiah who opens the graves at his coming. Speaking of any individual who has qualified to be part of God's family, Jesus said, "I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44).

Again, Jesus said: "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life" (John 5:26-29).

Those who are God's children on this earth have a promise from Jesus: "I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40). This resurrection to life occurs at Christ's return to this earth, as we've seen. "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory," wrote Paul (Col. 3:4). "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints," Jude tells us (Jude 14).

The disciples were standing with the resurrected Jesus on the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem. As they watched, Jesus disappeared behind the clouds. They heard a voice say: "... Why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9-11).

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Jesus had already told his disciples how he would return. "They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt. 24:31).

John said Jesus was "coming quickly"—at least in the way God counts time, to whom a thousand years is but a day (II Pet. 3:8). John then recorded this statement by the glorified Jesus: "My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Rev. 22:12). In our generation, that day is very near.

### Jesus as King Over Earth

Jesus will take over the reins of world government at his coming. This eventful moment is to be announced by an angel blasting on a trumpet. "Then the seventh angel sounded: and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Rev. 11:15).

It is a time of great crisis and world war. If it were not for the elect's sake, not a single human being would be left alive (Matt. 24:22). "The nations were angry ["nations" is the proper reading in the official Greek text], and Your wrath has come," John heard voices from heaven saying. It was "the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great" (Rev. 11:18).

The nations will not welcome Jesus. The political and military authorities will actually fight the Christ. "These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful" (Rev. 17:14).

Before he became Jesus, the Word inspired the Hebrew prophet Zechariah to lay out the scenario of exactly what would happen when he returned to this earth as the Messiah:

"Behold the day of the Lord is coming. . . .

"For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem. . . . Then the Lord will go forth and fight against

those nations. . . . And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives. . . . In that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem. . . . And the Lord shall be King over all the earth" (Zech. 14:1-9).

And the saints made immortal—made part of God's eternal family—will they rule with Christ on the earth? Yes, they will. "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God; and they will reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10, *New International Version*).

Humans obedient and submissive to God, humans changed into spirit, humans made God—these will be given "power over the nations" by the Word (Rev. 2:26). They will live and reign with Christ for a thousand years—a millennium of time (Rev. 20:4).

What about everyone else? "But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. . . ." (Rev. 20:5).

During the Millennium, Jesus will make salvation available to every human alive. "After those days," says the Lord, "I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more" (Heb. 8:10-12).

Then, after the Millennium is over, the rest of the dead will be given their opportunity to be called to salvation. Jesus will also write his laws on their minds through the power of the Holy Spirit. They too, from the person who was a slave in his former life to one who ruled a nation, will know that Jesus is God. Finally, every human will have been given an opportunity for salvation. The family of God will be complete. What happens next?

### **The Plan Completed**

In one sense, the purpose of God will then be finished. "Then comes the end, when He [Jesus] delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all

authority and power. For He must reign till he has put all enemies under His feet" (I Cor. 15:24-25).

But the end is only the beginning. In vision, John saw a new heaven and earth, the first ones having passed away. He heard a voice saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God [the Father] is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:1-4).

God the Father will be with "men"—mortal humans made into eternal members of the God family. The Word will have finished his work with the human family. No mortal humans will exist any longer. Jesus will have delivered multitudes of sons to the Father. *Now, the real work must begin.* "Then He who sat on the throne [God, the Father] said, 'Behold, I make all things new'" (Rev. 21:5).

The Word was the Alpha—the Beginning. He worked on the initial plan to create God-family members. The Word as the Lord created the human race and worked with them in various ways until his first coming. Then, as Jesus the sacrificial Lamb, he lived a perfect life and paid the penalty of human sin. As the resurrected High Priest, the Word built his scattered congregation of faithful Christians.

Soon he will return as the Messiah to take control of world government and offer salvation to every living human. Finally, he will resurrect the multitudes who have died without God so they too can have their opportunity for salvation. The Word will become the Omega—the End of all things. He will have completed God's staggering project.

*The real hope  
of the human race is  
in the resurrection of  
Jesus and his life—  
a life he lives in  
repentant humans.*

# FOLLOWING IN CHRIST'S FOOTSTEPS

**J**ESUS PREACHED THAT the real purpose of human life is to form a special relationship with God. In essence, humans are to love God. It is that simple, that down-to-earth. Yet, based on human strength alone, that seems an *impossible* task.

Jesus told people that to love God means to place him first in every nook and cranny of their lives. Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment" (Matt. 22:38).

Of course, that is *not* a new principle. The words Jesus spoke came from Deuteronomy 6:5, in the Hebrew Bible. Jesus, as the Lord God, had given that principle over 1,400 years earlier. He is the God who had commanded the people to love *him* in this manner.

Virtually no one has really understood what it means to put God first in everything nor how to accomplish such a task. The way was finally revealed in the late '20s and early '30s A.D. Jesus was on the earth, God in human flesh. He set himself as the example of one who puts God first. Jesus said his life-style embodied what it meant to have a spiritual relationship with God.

Jesus told his listeners, "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me" (John 12:26). The true believer would live his or

her life exactly as Christ did—in relationship to God. Jesus explained this to his disciples. “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10).

God’s commandments and laws reveal what God thinks, how he looks at things. What are his commandments? There is only one way to know and that’s through Jesus. Why so? Because God had never directly dealt with the human race. The Ten Commandments, for example, were delivered by the Word—the Lord. But the Lord of the Hebrew Bible *was the one who became Jesus Christ*. So it is always Jesus in his various offices throughout human history who is revealing what the Father’s commandments are.

Finally, Jesus came to magnify the law and make it glorious or honorable (Isa. 42:21). Jesus showed in what way these Old Testament commandments are the foundation of a loving relationship between the human being and God. He made the relationship clear through his own living example.

### **What Almost No One Understood**

The religious people of Jesus’ day had misinterpreted God’s requirement for salvation.

Jesus told them: “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:39-40). They were unwilling to see Jesus as the embodiment of the very laws they claimed to believe in. It was the most incredible irony.

Jesus continued speaking to the religious hierarchy: “But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. . . . Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me” (John 5:42-46).

The commandments in the Hebrew Bible express what the Lord—now Jesus—is like. That is, how he thinks and acts. Since Jesus is a spiritual mirror image of God the Father this has the effect of revealing the Father to the human race.

But the very people who had this portrait of Jesus as

God in their law, misunderstood. The Pharisees and other religious groups put their trust in words written on scrolls. They were unaware of the truth that lay behind these words. They thought that humans (them, of course) *naturally* wanted to obey God. They boasted in their possession of the Hebrew Bible and the name of God (Rom. 2:17).

These most religious individuals became mired, bogged down in law-keeping itself. Laws became an end in themselves; God was really forgotten (Mark 7:5-13).

Yes, the religious leaders thought they believed what Moses wrote (John 5:45). But they didn't see that Moses' writings reflected the mind of God—the Word, and now Jesus in the flesh. They were looking eyeball to eyeball—and couldn't see him—at the God who had inspired Moses.

They were watching the example of Jesus. But they were unwilling to see him as the Light and Way toward establishing a true relationship of love with God. The religious leaders were unwilling to give up their ideas, their position, in order to find God. Yet, the very things they were all clinging to so desperately were the ones that have to be given up for salvation.

Paul summarized the problem of the religious community living in Jesus' time. "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end [that is, *the intent*] of the law . . ." (Rom 10:3-4).

### **More Than Just Keeping God's Law**

There is much more to obeying and submitting to God than keeping his commandments.

The story of the rich young man who came to Jesus illustrates this point. "Now as He [Jesus] was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?'" (Mark 10:17).

Here was a person asking the right question: How can I be saved? He was enthusiastic—running to Jesus. He worshiped Jesus, falling down on his knees. So far so good. The



conversation continued. Jesus said, "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt. 19:17). The rich young man asked which commandments he meant. Jesus then listed five of the Ten Commandments of the spiritual law.

"The young man said to Him, 'All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?'" (Matt. 19:20). So far still so good. This man was obeying God, following his commandments. He must have thought he was already living his life in such a way as to be able to inherit eternal life. He must have eagerly awaited Jesus' pat on the back.

Jesus dropped a bombshell instead. "You still lack one thing. Sell *all that you have* and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.' But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich" (Luke 18:22-23, emphasis added). The man's face fell. *Sell all I have? That's my whole life. I can't do that.* The rich man walked away in shock.

The disciples were also dumb-founded. If keeping all the commandments isn't enough, what is? "Who then can be saved?" they asked. Jesus said, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:25-26). The rich man would have been required to give up the very thing that meant the most to him—his money. He was not willing to put God first in his life.

Making God No. 1 in life is not easy. It usually means dealing with "sticking points," the things dearest to human hearts. That's why there are few true Christians. People may worship Christ. Some may do a fairly good job of keeping at least some of God's commandments. Submitting to God in everything is very different, though. That's the really hard part of the Christian life.

That's why Jesus said, "Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." He was speaking to those who believed and worshiped him, not his enemies. Jesus continued: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matt. 7:14, 21).

What does it mean to "do the will of God"? It means to enter into the kind of relationship in which God always comes first—no matter what the circumstances. In effect, it

requires people to give up their lives while they live them. Jesus said, "He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life *in this world* will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25, emphasis added).

How does this translate into how we live? One example: Jesus said that putting God first is a revolutionary concept. People would think it crazy. Why observe this? Why abstain from that? *Why not do this?* they'd wonder. Peter said friends and family wouldn't understand the changes a true Christian makes: "They are astonished that you are not still rushing hand in hand with them into the same excesses of profligate living, and they abuse you for it" (II Pet. 4:4, *Williams Translation*).

Persons called to follow Jesus might find themselves at odds with workers, friends and family. So Jesus said: "And a man's foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:36-39).

The true believer must put God before everything and everyone. Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matt. 16:24-25).

Never had conditions for discipleship been so stringent, so tough. No excuses were accepted and no quarter given. A follower had to measure up to the standard set down or go his way. Case closed. Jesus said, "Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." Then, speaking directly to his followers, Jesus said, "Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27, 33).

*T*here is much more to obeying and submitting to God than keeping his commandments.

Real human suffering can result from the *denial of self* and the struggle to put God first. In this way, humans carry the same cross through life that Jesus did. No matter what the consequences, he always did what pleased the Father. His followers must do the same. Paul told the Christians at Philippi, "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil. 1:29).

One kind of struggle is particularly difficult: It is the spiritual fight that must take place to put down thoughts and actions threatening the relationship between God and one of his human children. To maintain closeness to God, a person must think and act like God does. To do otherwise, "misses the mark"—it is sin. God does not change what he is. If a person finds himself separated from God, it is he who has moved away from God, not vice versa!

### The Battle in the Mind

Paul wrote of this spiritual war going on inside the mind. "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want" (Gal. 5:17, *New International Version*).

Paul wrote to Christians, encouraging them, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal [that is, simply human] but mighty in God [through the Holy Spirit] for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments [thoughts trying to convince us we don't need to give up what we want] and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (II Cor. 10:4-5).

Can it be done? Jesus said all things are possible with God—through his Spirit. Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

Paul called on true Christians to make the supreme sacrifice: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that

good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:1-2).

True Christians must take up their "cross" with Christ. They must mortify every human desire interfering with their relationship of love with God. Paul said, "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal. 5:24).

Just before making this statement, Paul listed some of the passions of the human mind which must be conquered. They are not a pretty lot. Here's the list Paul gave. "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness [impurity of mind], licentiousness [indecentcy, debauchery], idolatry [worshiping our false gods], sorcery [witchcraft, spiritism], hatred, contentions [discord and quarrels], jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions [factions], heresies [party spirit], envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries [orgies], and the like," continued Paul, "of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19-21). Why not? The reason such persons cannot obtain salvation is that they do not think like God. Hence, they are not in a proper love relationship with him.

### Putting Sin to Death

In order to have a right relationship with God, an individual must put off "the former person" that engaged in these activities of the lower nature. Slay the beast of sin, Paul admonished, "Therefore put to death your members [that is, sinful actions] which are on the earth. . . ." (Col. 3:5).

Paul wrote: "But now you must also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the *old man* with his deeds, and have put on the *new man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (Col. 3:8-10, emphasis added).

Of what thoughts and actions is the new man to be composed? He or she is led by the Spirit of God. Such a person exhibits true love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). "Against such there is no law," Paul wrote (Gal. 5:23). The

reason is that these qualities represent what God himself is like and there can be no law against God since he alone has the wisdom to make the rules (Jas. 4:12).

To be "crucified with Christ" is to crucify those desires, thoughts and actions that are ungodly—that represent what God is not. The opposite course of action is to seek God's way of life. Jesus said, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). To seek his righteousness is to seek God, the way he is, and to emulate it. To seek it *first* means to put God above every thought, desire, need, person, fear, hope, want, lust or craving we might have.

When the human is able to do that—really do it, because God cannot be fooled—a great paradox occurs. The things humans really need in life for well-being such as food, drink, bodily needs, clothing and the rest—"all these things shall be added to you," said Jesus (Matt. 6:34). Also added are friends, love and spiritual family. And they are added by God so the promise is sure.

**T**o be "crucified with Christ" is to crucify those desires, thoughts and actions that are ungodly—that represent what God is not.

God does not expect people to seek him for nothing; he isn't looking for martyrs. There is a reason every human must submit to God. He must be sure the mind behind that human will be willing to submit throughout eternity. That is very serious business.

But there is a reward for the true believer. Paul said, "He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb.

11:6). So what is the answer to Peter's question? What should the person who has crucified him or herself in service to God expect to receive?

Jesus' answer to Peter applies to everyone: "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for

My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecution—and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mark 10:29-30). There is a payoff for developing God-like character, now and in the life to come.

God's object is to have his human children connect to him in love. Once they accomplish that task—and maintain the connection—they can be blessed. They also receive the gift of eternal life, which is the real purpose of human existence.

### **The Example for All Ages**

Jesus is the perfect example. God sent the Word into this world as Jesus Christ. For 33½ years Jesus served his Father by speaking the Father's words. Jesus lived his life in total obedience to his Father.

Jesus is the world's light (John 1:9), its way, truth and life (John 14:6). He is the example for the whole human race. Jesus personified love toward God. Jesus' life explains what it means to love God, to seek God, to serve God, to be like God. Jesus loved the Father with all his heart, all his soul, all his mind and all his strength. He also loved his neighbor as himself. In fact, Jesus loved his neighbor more than himself because he gave his life for his neighbor.

Who, then, is Jesus? Jesus is God, Man, Creator, Priest, Sacrifice. Jesus is the role model for the entire human race. Most humans will ultimately acknowledge Jesus by seeking to become like him. Jesus is our perfect example for living. He is our perfect example in suffering. He is our perfect example for loving God.

Every spiritual son and daughter of God will one day inherit all things with Jesus, the elder brother of those from the human race who will be God's children.

# “And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”

Luke 6:46

Jesus Christ made it clear that genuine Christianity is more than just a verbal confession, however sincere.

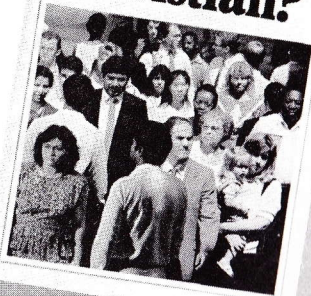
As He said, “Not everyone that says unto me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 7:21).

Well, who will find salvation then? What is God looking for? Is regular church attendance enough? How about a good attitude and a friendly smile? What really makes someone a Christian?

This free booklet *What Is a Real Christian?* will help you discover the answer. No question could be more important to those seeking a true relationship with God.

To receive your free copy of *What Is a Real Christian?* send your request to one of our addresses listed on the last page of this booklet.

**What Is a  
REAL  
Christian?**



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