

# 9

## JESUS

### **Jesus the Messiah**

Christians tend to have long memories! We honour the apostles of the New Testament, the prophets of the Old, the church fathers in the early church period, and various notables since: Martin Luther, John Calvin, Charles Spurgeon, Corrie Ten Boom and so on. So it is that Christians read and enjoy, and find valuable books and teaching published perhaps hundreds of years earlier. So literary classics, such as John Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress*, originally published in 1678, are books still sought by serious Christians as helpful in their own pilgrimage. The author finds Alfred Edersheim's<sup>1</sup> *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah*, first published in 1883 to be a useful reference. Written by a Messianic Jew (a Jewish believer in the Lord Jesus) and a man with a truly encyclopedic knowledge of ancient Jewish writings, as well as the Christian Scriptures, Edersheim's book remains generally available today.<sup>2</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Edersheim (1825-1889) was born in Vienna to Jewish parents. Converted to Christianity as a young man whilst studying in England. He studies theology in Edinburgh and Berlin, and was one of the leading authorities of his time regarding the doctrines and practices of Judaism in the centuries preceding and during the early Christian era.

<sup>2</sup> Republished in 1993 by Hendrickson Publishers Inc, ISBN: 0-943575-83-4.

more than 1,100 pages it traces the background to the New Testament and gives a real sense of the times of Jesus — political, cultural, economic and historical. Edersheim makes the valuable observation that there are in excess of 900 messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. In other words, prophecies that point towards the coming Jewish Messiah, who was always identified also as *the* Saviour, and whom Christians readily recognize as Jesus, their Lord. Appendix 9 to Edersheim's book lists some hundreds of these prophecies. The author has found it both helpful and genuinely exciting to simply mark in his own Bible all references to the future Messiah. Often we find several such prophecies on a single page in the Old Testament, as well as entire chapters that are exclusively Messianic.<sup>3</sup> After a while a diligent student will become attuned to spotting these prophecies and develop a sense of what to look out for. Christians reading this book who have never tried this exercise may want to prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit to open their eyes to perceive such prophecies as they read the Old Testament. The pay-off in this exercise (if we may put it so prosaically!) is that the Christian's confidence in the truthfulness and accuracy of the Bible will be increased, as well as gaining a heightened assurance that the as-yet unfulfilled prophecies will also come to pass.

So what is a prophet and why is this of interest in our exploration of the *empty promise* of Godism? As so often in this book, we find that a challenge must revert to the Godist to give their understanding of the role and limits of prophets and prophecy. This is particularly relevant as Godists usually find they are on difficult ground in determining which prophets they consider to be genuine and which false. So

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Isaiah chapter 53 which foretells the crucifixion of Jesus.

Godists will generally say that they consider the prophets of the so-called higher religions are genuine, but others very often are written off as false or mistaken. So Mohammed the founder of Islam is considered by them to be a prophet, whereas Joseph Smith the founder of the Mormon religion is not considered to be the genuine article, despite the fact that the lives of Mohammed and Joseph Smith display striking similarities — a matter of simple historical record. Since the Holy Bible tells us of the existence of false as well as genuine prophets (see for example Jeremiah chapters 26 and 28 and Ezekiel 13), we note that it is important to make a distinction between the genuine and the false. If we fail to make that distinction then like many Israelites of old, we risk being led astray. Indeed the New Testament contains a significant number of warnings about a time when false religious teachers will hold sway within society and that this will infect even the Church. The Lord Jesus Himself warned that ‘many’ deceivers would come masquerading in His name (Matthew 24:5) and that this would be a feature especially towards the end of time, when ‘many false prophets’ will appear and ‘deceive many people’ (Matthew 24:11) and that ‘many’ will turn away from the faith (v. 10). These are sober warnings indeed. As the Lord Jesus made them we are bound, if we are Christians, to take them seriously and to meditate upon them. Readers who want a clearer picture of the world in the end times may want to read the entirety of Matthew chapter 24. Jesus speaks of the love of ‘most’ growing cold at that time — and when He says this, the context seems primarily to be a reference to the Church rather than to society as whole, which elsewhere He tells us will by then have been fractured beyond repair. The apostle Paul in writing to Timothy his ‘dear son’ also warns that a time will come **when men will not put up with**

**sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.** (2 Timothy 4:3). Paul goes on to say that these people will turn away from truth ‘and turn aside to myths’. Although there have always been times when the church has faced heresy and demonic assault, it should be a matter of concern that in the early twenty-first century we do seem to see exactly this scenario being played out. So governments and societal leaders gather about them in our own day ‘teachers’ who tell them that there are many paths to ‘god’ and that the future lies in the multi-faith agenda. Covered by the fig-leaf of societal cohesion and the desire to be tolerant of all, politicians and ‘religious leaders’ are at last finding that they can be rid of the ‘irksome’ and exclusive demands of the Lord Jesus — and of Christianity.

What are the biblical marks of a true prophet, then? Several criteria are set out in the Holy Bible in order to evaluate prophecy and prophets: (1) prophecy must be in continuity with the customs and traditions of Israel as enshrined in the Torah (Deuteronomy 13:1–5; 18:20; cf Romans 12:6); (2) the prophet must speak only that which the Lord commands (Deuteronomy 18:20); and (3) true prophecy will be historically verified (Deuteronomy 18:21–22; Jeremiah 28:8–9). The author well remembers a wide-eyed and innocent new Christian inviting him to come and hear a foreign speaker to whom her church (one of the smaller house churches) had accorded the status of true prophet, on a par with the prophets of old. I duly went and listened to the gentleman. He said nothing out of the ordinary and appeared to be a sound Christian. However it is impossible for Christians to speak of there being current-day prophets. The era of the prophets is gone. As the apostle Paul

reminded the early church (Ephesians 2:20 in particular, but see verses 11 to 22 to acquire the context in which Paul made the assertion) God's household is 'built' upon **the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone**. The era of prophets ended with those in the Old Testament who continued to prophesy about the coming future Messiah. Their role was completed by the apostles and the chief cornerstone, Jesus Christ. The church is built upon foundations already laid. There is no biblical idea of further foundations to be laid, as though we are to build an 'extension' or 'extensions' to the house of God, although this seems to be precisely the position of the determined Godist. The generic subjects of apostleship and of prophecy and prophets is outside the scope of this book, and there is plenty of good material for readers who want to explore these in greater depth. We will leave the subject with this thought: has God sent new prophets? If yes, how do they meet the criteria already set out in the Scriptures? And when will He stop sending these additional prophets — are we to expect more in the future? Or has God been true to His Word, quite literally, in sending prophets to point the way to the Messiah, and concluding that era of prophets with the apostles of the early church? Those who believe in post-apostolic prophets and prophecies will surely find themselves easily led. And one day there will appear an Antichrist who will be so powerful and compelling that he will threaten to lead astray **even the elect, if that were possible** (Matthew 24:24; and see also Mark 13:22). Godists will find themselves especially vulnerable when this prophecy is fulfilled.

Throughout this book we have assumed a certain minimum level of understanding among readers about both Jesus and His role as Messiah. Today both assumptions are

dangerous. In what is increasingly a post-Christian culture in the western world, and with education arguably dumbed-down, religious concepts that a reasonably educated person just two generations ago would readily have understood (as a reflection of their basic education) are today largely unknown, as biblical questions in Britain's popular TV quiz show *University Challenge* attests. In this TV show highly educated students from some of the world's top universities reveal themselves to be completely ignorant of the Bible. It is in this ground of general biblical ignorance that Godism as a philosophy finds it so easy to take root. As there will be readers who struggle with the idea of Jesus as Messiah, or indeed may have never encountered this concept, we owe them at least a short exposition of what Christianity is all about.<sup>4</sup>

**Yeshua** was a common name among Jews of the Second Temple Period, and is believed to be the Hebrew or Aramaic name for Jesus. In modern Hebrew, *Yeshu* and *Yeshua* are in fact the common transcriptions for Jesus. The understanding that this pronunciation and Hebrew spelling accurately represent the original and historic name of the man we now know almost universally in the English speaking world as Jesus remains the subject of some scholarly debate, but the normative view today is that Yeshua is the correct original Hebrew rendering of that name. Messiah is a title derived from Hebrew *mashiach*, a verbal adjective meaning anointed one. Along with its New Testament Greek equivalent *christos* (Christ) it refers to an act of consecration where an individual is set apart to serve God and anointed

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<sup>4</sup> Some material in this chapter is borrowed from *The Birth of Christ* (Glory to Glory Publications, ISBN 0-9551790-1-7) by Peter Sammons. Readers who want to get an understanding of the birth narratives of Jesus and why Christians consider them to be reliable, as well as a more detailed appreciation of what the author calls *salvation history*, may want to consult this book.

(smeared or sprinkled) with oil.

Jewish hope for the advent of the Messiah developed from David's reign when it was prophesied that his kingdom would continue until the end of time (2 Samuel 7:16). Israel was told that, through David's descendants, his throne would exert a never ending dominion over all the earth (2 Samuel 22:48 – 51; also Jeremiah 33). The New Testament writers discern that He who is the child of supernatural origins (Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2) carries the full weight of divinity (Isaiah 9:6; Philippians 2:6; Colossians 1:19) and is both Son of God and worthy to receive the worship of all men (Palm 45:6–7; cf Hebrews 1:8–9). Jesus, fully aware of the messianic focus of Scripture (John 5:46; 8:56) acknowledged Himself to be *the Christ* on numerous occasions. He accepted the title from the crowds on what we think of as Palm Sunday during the triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:9), from blind Bartimeus (Mark 10:46–48), from the children in the Temple (Matthew 21:15) and in other situations as well — see Matthew 16:16 – 18; Mark 14:61–2; Luke 4:21; John 4:25–6. Jesus warned His disciples not to advertise His miraculous acts as those of the Messiah prior to His resurrection (Matthew 17:9; Luke 9:20–21). As Jesus knew that the popular and faulty idea was of a military styled Messiah who would become a political saviour, Jesus avoided the use of the term Messiah and instead used the title Son of Man, which is taken from the prophet Daniel's vision of a heavenly conqueror (Daniel 7:13–14). Jesus consistently employed this less well known title and endued it with the true character of messianic salvation. We now pause to explore some basic Christian theology about God's overall plan of salvation for mankind.

### Stages in God's plan of Salvation

It is impossible to appreciate the full meaning of Jesus without recognising that His entry into the world, His subsequent life, death and resurrection from the dead are part of an overall scheme devised by God to remedy human kind's state of enmity with and rebellion against God. The relationship of humans to their God is 'fallen' from the intended state of close friendship and spiritual intimacy so clearly described in the early chapters of Genesis. This condition is usually described by theologians as 'the fall'. The Bible explains that a state of sin separates us from God and spoils our relationship with Him. The Bible teaches that the fall of Satan, an archangel, with certain other angels, took place before the world was created. Jesus himself (probably) referred to this fall in Luke 10:18 — **"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."** A fascinating glimpse of the battle in heaven that preceded Satan's expulsion is found in Revelation 12:7–12. Jesus referred to Satan's character in John 8:44: **"He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him."** It seems that Satan and other rebel angels, thrown out of heaven, sought to obtain possession of the world shortly after its creation and similar possession of mankind,<sup>5</sup> which had been created for special and intimate fellowship with God. In order to hurt God and to gain a measure of temporary control over His world, Satan induced mankind to rebel against God (or to 'sin'), as set out in Genesis chapter 3, which led to humans becoming *spiritually fallen* beings, their previous intimate and loving relationship with God being replaced by fear and shame.

Whether Genesis chapter 3 is accepted as literal or

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<sup>5</sup> The Bible always refers to humankind as mankind. We follow this practice.



allegorical, the essential reality portrayed in the Bible remains: humans *are* alienated from a God of love and holiness. Mankind's 'natural' spiritual state is dead, rather than alive. Man's innermost being (or soul) is blinded and perverted from what it was intended to be and our physical body is liable to disease and death. Most importantly, the moral disease of sin (or rebellion against God) is ever-present in the very bloodstream of the human race. So it was that mankind passed under the usurped and limited control of Satan (e.g. see Acts 26:18; Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 2:14). Certainly our broken and often disastrously flawed human relationships, whether they are between individuals, groups or nations, seem to confirm that there is something badly wrong with mankind.

Living, as we do, in an age where self-promotion and self-fulfilment are considered to represent the highest expression of human life, some readers may complain that sin — falling short of God's standards, even rebellion against God — cannot be so serious as to make a full relationship with Him impossible. Among the world's religions only Christianity teaches that sin is serious — so serious that we cannot remedy it ourselves and need to be saved from its power and its effects. It is fair to say that most religions teach that people work and earn their way to a 'right' relationship with God by observing religious ceremonies and by doing things that will appease God. This, emphatically, is not the Christian message. The Bible teaches that sin is so bad that God will not tolerate it at all. He is completely holy and completely righteous. That is how we need to be if we are to have a right relationship with Him. Since we cannot make ourselves holy and righteous, a complete and effective remedy to our condition as *spiritually fallen beings* is necessary. Two things need to be kept in mind:

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1. We are all sinful (Romans 3:23)
2. Sin is not just the awful things we easily recognise as sin (e.g. murder, robbery, violence). It is, equally, all the rebellions we have against God's right to be God in our lives. Sin, then, can be simply ignoring God.

Isn't it completely overbearing of God to be so hard on sin? To answer that question we might consider that if sin is not as serious as the Bible tells us it is, God would have found a simpler and less costly way of dealing with it than the way the Bible tells us He decided upon. This way ultimately involved the sacrifice of His Son on a cross of execution — a humiliating, disgraceful, torturous form of death, borne by the one person in history who was without sin.

In order to rescue humans from the power, grip and guilt of sin, to fully restore us to our former position which was lost in the Garden of Eden, and indeed to elevate us to a yet higher position (that of being adopted as children of God<sup>6</sup>) God determined on a plan of salvation. But this plan would be immensely costly because, as the apostle Paul wrote **the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord** (Romans 6:23). It was the Lord Jesus who was to pay the price. As the apostle Paul again wrote: **For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!** (Romans 5:10). The baby born in Bethlehem in 6 to 5 B.C. was born to achieve God's plan of salvation.

Did God make a mistake in allowing the fall of mankind to occur? Did He know it was going to happen and if He did,

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<sup>6</sup> There are a number of references in the Bible to our adoption as children — e.g. see Ephesians 1:5–7 and Romans 8:15–17.

is He not at least partly responsible for the effects of sin in His world? The Bible does not give us a clear answer as to why God allowed sin to enter His world, but He certainly went to extraordinarily costly lengths to provide for all people an escape route *from* the power and consequences of sin *to* the safety of kinship with His Son. A former Principal of the Birmingham Bible Institute in the UK, H. Brash Bonsall, examined this difficult question in his excellent study book *The Person of Christ*:

‘While it is plain from Scripture that God *foreknew* that the Fall of Man would occur, it must never be thought that he *foreordained* it. This would be to regard God as the author of sin, and as morally responsible for the effects of it. He *foreknew* the Fall; but He *foreordained* Redemption. The difference between the two words may be made clear by an illustration. Some years ago the Perth to London express train was travelling near the Boxmoor Tunnel at 70 m.p.h. just before the diversion from the fast to the slow line. These points should have been taken at 15 m.p.h.. The train consequently left the rails and plunged over the embankment. As a result over forty people lost their lives. At the enquiry the signalman stated that he observed the train running too rapidly for safety and testified “*I saw it would happen.*” He *foreknew* there would be a train wreck but he did not foreordain it, indeed he did all in his power to avert it. It was so with God in relation to the Fall of Man. Why He did not prevent it is a problem which the Bible does not explain. We can only take the facts as we find them and as the Bible states them to be — that is, that God’s creature, man, has fallen and that he has been redeemed. Until we have clearer light we must trust where we cannot trace.’<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *The Person of Christ*, H. Brash Bonsall, Christian Literature Crusade (1967) p. 22

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God's plan of salvation is also referred to as a plan of redemption. When the word 'redemption' or 'redeemed' is used in every day life, it indicates that something has been bought back, or regained by payment of money or by effort. In the theological context, the word 'redeem' refers to God 'buying-back' mankind, by paying the price necessitated by sin in order to return mankind to a right relationship with Himself. The Bible is certain about the fact, the process and the extent of redemption, as the following four quotations make clear:

**But now he [Christ] has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgement, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.** (Hebrews 9:26–28)

**For he rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.** (Colossians 1:13)

**He [Jesus Christ] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.** (1 John 2:2)

**. . . if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord" and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.** (Rom 10:9)

Christ, then, swapped places with us and paid on our behalf the price of our rebellion against God. We have something to do (confess Jesus is Lord — which action has as much to do with true belief in Him and acceptance of His right to be Lord of every aspect of our lives as it does with using a certain form of words as some religious mantra)

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and God guarantees that Christ's death in our place is *the* necessary atoning sacrifice, sufficient for the needs of the whole world. The various stages in God's redemptive plan can be described as:

Christ's Incarnation

Christ's redeeming death

Christ's Resurrection from the dead

Christ's Ascension, and His ministry from heaven on behalf of His people

Christ's future return in glory

The Incarnation was an event in history, which began when a baby was born in humble circumstances in Bethlehem some two thousand years ago. The baby grew quite normally to become a man who lived in the world for a total of around thirty-three years. But what of this idea of 'Incarnation'? What exactly does it convey? The term *Incarnation* comes from two Latin words *in*, 'in' and *caro*, 'flesh' and means the doctrine that at a given point in time God took upon Himself human flesh and, with it, human nature. What makes the Lord Jesus distinct from all other human beings, both before and since, is that He was without sin. He never sinned or in any way rebelled against God. He only is good enough to pay the 'wages' of sin — death. How do we know that Jesus was without sin and that therefore His death is completely adequate payment for our sins? Two answers help us here; first, there is nothing in the accounts that we have of the life of Jesus that looks remotely like rebellion against God. Everywhere the opposite is evident — that the Lord Jesus submitted Himself entirely to His Father's will. **"Yet not as I will, but as you will"** (Matthew 26:39) was more than simply a statement of His priorities,

it was in every sense the reality at the centre of His being. Second, the Bible itself makes clear that He was without sin: **But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin** (1 John 3:5–6).

### **Who Paid the Price? The Baby Born to Die**

Staying with the theological aspects of Christ's Incarnation a little longer, we see that the Incarnation — God becoming flesh — is an essential factor in order for God to secure the redemption of mankind. Whilst there are many facets to this doctrine of the Incarnation, in relation to the birth of the Lord Jesus, three are particularly important:

Firstly, *Christ was born to die*. Redemption involves a substitutionary death — someone dying in the place of the guilty one. God the Father cannot die, but Man can. Only if the Son became a man could he die. In this sense the Lord Jesus was 'born to die' as is emphasised in Hebrews 2:9— **we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.**

It should be noted that there is something in the death of the Lord Jesus which will never be experienced by His children (i.e. those adopted into His family as made clear in Hebrews 2:9–13). When we die, even if we think or feel we are forsaken, God will be there — having promised never to leave or forsake us. But when Christ died, the Father's presence was withdrawn from the Son because He who was without sin was made sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). And this separation from God is the ultimate penalty for sin - no wonder Jesus called out from the cross **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** (Matthew 27:46).

Secondly, *God the Father cannot represent man in*

*sacrifice*, only a man can do that. The Lord Jesus became a man so that He could, on behalf of all mankind, offer His life. In Romans 5:12–21 Paul writes about the representative nature of Adam’s and Christ’s acts, the first in bringing sin into the world, the second in providing the gift of righteousness. **If, by the trespass of the one man [Adam] death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.** Because only a man could represent mankind, so it was necessary for a baby to be born into the world, who would become that representative.

Thirdly, *Christ’s redemption covers all mankind* — everyone who ever lived — not just those who are saved by accepting His free gift of salvation. This means that the price is paid, but that the free gift of salvation still has to be accepted by each individual. To underline that Christ’s redemption is *for all*, we recall that John the baptist said **“Look, the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!” (John 1:29)**. Reference to ‘the world’ in Scripture, and especially in the apostle John’s writings, means the whole mass of mankind, loved by God (see John 3:16) and able to be saved, but at present under the domination of the ‘prince of this world’ — the devil (John 14:30). The Lord Jesus, as God’s sacrificial Lamb, is, in John’s words, **“the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”** (1 John 2:2).

On this latter point of Christ’s redemption covering all mankind, for clarity and to avoid any misunderstanding it should also be noted that this redemption is not automatic — in other words not everyone is saved. Such a belief is mistakenly taught by some both within the umbrella of the Christian church and also beyond the church. The idea is

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that everyone will be saved and made right with God — a superficially attractive idea but one which is dangerous in the sense that it denies God His right (and duty) to see justice done and one which runs counter to the clear teaching of the Bible on this issue. H. Brash Bonsall in *The Person of Christ* casts some light on this:

‘The Bible says **“Return to me; for I have redeemed thee”** (Isaiah 44:22). One may be redeemed, but if the conditions of repentance and faith are not fulfilled, if the offer is not closed with, the redemption is without effect. Thus a cancer remedy might be discovered and offered free to all, but not all would thereby be saved. Some would never hear, some would hear and not believe, some would hear and believe but not actually take the remedy; all would die. Only those who, hearing, believed and by an *act* of faith actually took the remedy, would live. James 2:14-16 defines faith as more than an intellectual assent; it is a belief which acts. . . .)’<sup>8</sup>

The prophet Isaiah provides a clue that it will be a *person* who would be needed to pay the price. And this person would go willingly to be the substitute for the sin — offering.

**Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,  
But a body you have prepared for me,  
burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.  
Then I said, “Here am I, I have come — it is written  
about me in the scroll.  
I desire to do your will, O my God;  
your law is within my heart.”**

(Isaiah 40:6–8)

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<sup>8</sup> *The Person of Christ*, H. Brash Bonsall, Christian Literature Crusade (1967 — p56)



No longer would God be satisfied with symbolic sacrifices of animals in the Temple. The days of the Jerusalem Temple were numbered, in any case. In a few years it would no longer be possible for the priests to sacrifice animals on behalf of the people.<sup>9</sup> Now a permanent and all-sufficient sacrifice was needed, and so God prepared a body of flesh for his Son. The sacrifice was to be made by God Himself, through the person of His Son.

### **Jesus the Saviour**

This title of Jesus, amongst so many titles found in the pages of the New Testament, is one of the most profound. Jesus entered a world where salvation was the deepest desire in the hearts of ordinary men and women. This was a time of immense cruelty of man to man — and particularly, of leaders to their people. There can seldom have been a time of such political insecurity. It was a time of tyrannical rulers who could do what they liked and do it to anyone. The crimes of Herod ‘the Great’ were so enormous that the slaughter of the babies in Bethlehem (in Herod’s vain attempt to kill the infant Jesus) was scarcely seen as abnormal. In the Jewish historian Josephus’ works, written a few years after the time of Christ, the slaughter of the little boys is not even mentioned, which some have taken to mean that it never happened, but more probably was simply an indication that this sort of behaviour towards ordinary people was not unusual.

This was an age of informers, where no one, especially in the courts of the kings and emperors, could live in security. The ancient ‘gods’ were on their way out. ‘It was not’ writes William Barclay ‘a case of men becoming so

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<sup>9</sup> The Temple was destroyed in AD70 by the Romans during the ‘Jewish War’.

depraved that they abandoned their gods; it was a case of the gods becoming so depraved that they were abandoned by men.’<sup>10</sup> The old gods were going and there was nothing to take their place except the worship of rulers, who were as depraved as their ‘gods’. It was a time of superstition, when demons were seen to be everywhere waiting to injure men — indeed the number of references to Jesus casting out demons suggests this may indeed have been so. It was a time of astralism, men believing that their fate was sealed by the stars under which they were born. This in turn led to fatalism and hopelessness, a return to which we are perhaps seeing at the beginning of the twenty first century. There was a consciousness of moral failure and moral helplessness — men knew they were sinners but knew no cure for sin. Small wonder, then, that they were searching for a Saviour. The very title ‘Saviour’ was prevalent at the time — any king, or even pretender to a throne, who could bring a measure of peace and security was often called a ‘Saviour’.

God, in the Old Testament, is often identified as Saviour, as a short list of references will illustrate: Isaiah 45:15, 21; Deuteronomy 32:15; 1 Samuel 10:19; Psalm 24:5; 27:9; 65:5; 79:9; 85:4–9; Micah 7:7; Habakkuk 3:18. The Old Testament points towards a state of salvation when God will enter His Kingdom and reign. Having seen the yearning for salvation in the predominantly pagan world into which Jesus was born, we see the word ‘Saviour’ in the New Testament also applied to God: In Mary’s song: **“My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour”** (Luke 1:47); Paul is an apostle by command of God our Saviour (1 Timothy 1:1); God our Saviour desires all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:3); The living God is the Saviour of all men, especially

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<sup>10</sup> *Jesus As They Saw Him* - William Barclay - SCM Press Ltd - 1962

those who believe (1 Timothy 4:10); Paul's preaching has been entrusted to him by the command of God our Saviour (Titus 1:3); Everything is to be done in such a way as to adorn the teaching of God our Saviour (Titus 2:10); In Christ there appeared the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour (Titus 3:4); In Jude the object of praise is the only God our Saviour (Jude 25)

Now this is an important truth to grasp: in working out God's plan of salvation, there is no tension between the stern wrath of God and the love of Jesus. It was not a case of Jesus doing something to alter the attitude of God to men, to convert the wrath of God into the love of God, or to persuade God to stay His hand, outstretched to punish. God is the Saviour God; Jesus did not live and die to change the attitude of God to men, rather he lived and died to show what that attitude is.

The Lord Jesus, also, is titled Saviour in the New Testament. The message of the angel Gabriel was that He was to be called Jesus, the Greek form of Yeshua, which means 'Jehovah is salvation'. Jesus was given this name, said Gabriel **because He will save his people from their sins.** (Matthew 1:21) Paul, when writing to the Hebrews, stated plainly that Jesus **is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.** (Hebrews 7:25). True, the title Saviour is used sparingly in the Gospels: in Matthew and Mark the title is not given; in Luke it is used only once, in the announcement of the angels to the shepherds: **"Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."** (Luke 2:12). In John's Gospel the title is, again, used only once. In John 4:42 the Samaritan villagers say to the woman who had

spoken with Jesus **“We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world.”**

Readers who are interested in a full survey of the title ‘Saviour’ as applied to the Lord Jesus are recommended to obtain the book *Jesus As They Saw Him* by William Barclay (referenced in note 10). It looks in detail at forty-two titles applied to Jesus and how these titles would have been understood in Jesus’ own day. Regarding the Lord’s role as Saviour, Barclay writes:

‘No matter from what angle it may be approached the basic and essential idea is the idea of *rescue*, rescue from a situation in which a man is quite unable to rescue himself. It is *rescue from the past*. Through the work of Jesus Christ the penalty which man’s sin deserves no longer hangs threateningly over him. The estrangement between man and God need no longer exist. The power and slavery of past sin are broken and man is no longer shackled by the chains which his own sin forged.

*‘It is rescue for the future*. Through Jesus Christ, the living and ever-present Christ, man is no longer a slave to his own sin. He can break the habits which have been his fetters, and conquer the sins which conquered him. He is no longer frustrated and defeated; he has found the way to victorious living. He is no longer the victim of temptation; he is victorious over temptation.

‘Salvation deals not only with a man’s past; it makes him a new man and gives him a new future. It is not merely negative escape; it is positive victory. Jesus is indeed the Saviour for whom men were desperately searching, and for whom the world was waiting, and whom the world still needs.’<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Jesus As They Saw Him*, William Barclay (SCM Press Ltd, 1962, p. 227).