

# *A Short Biography of Jesus Without the Miraculous*

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## *Introduction*

We all know the miraculous claims about Jesus: He died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. He did miraculous healings, etc.

However, to know whether we are going to trust any of these stories, we have to know about the man *Jesus*. We have to know a bit more about His agenda, His friends, and His enemies.

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## *A Counter-Intuitive Story More Miraculous Than Any Miracle Recounted in The Gospels*

The picture of Jesus given by the recollections of his friends is a simple one. It is a highly counter-intuitive picture. If one were going to invent the story of a miraculous figure who was divine, the story about Jesus would be the last kind of story to tell. Yet, it is the very fact the story is so contrary to how we would write such a story if we were going to dupe people that gives it its amazing validity.

Who is going to want to follow someone tried and hanged as a criminal? Who is going to want to hear any philosophy of a person who is a carpenter? Who is going to want to listen to theology expounded by followers who are simple fishermen? Yet, from this bizarre set of weak facts emerges the most amazing figure of all history. It is this weak context that makes the words of Jesus all the more startling due to their brilliance and sublimeness. The very *existence* of Jesus' words are the best evidence of their divine origin.

It is as Wil Durant says:

That a few simple men should in one generation have invented so powerful and appealing a personality, so lofty an ethic, and so inspiring a vision of human brotherhood, would be a miracle far more incredible than any recorded in the gospels. After two centuries of higher criticism [i.e. unkind criticism] the outlines of the life, character, and teaching of Christ remain reasonably clear, and constitute the most fascinating feature in the history of Western man. (*Caesar & Christ* (N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1944) Vol. 3 at 557.)

If we tried hiring a team of Hollywood writers to tell a better story, we would not find it. No one has ever written a fictional account about a hero of such appeal as the story of Jesus presents in world literature. The closest parallel is between Plato, the pupil, and Socrates, his teacher. Socrates, like Jesus, was a rebel and very wise. Yet, the story of Socrates taking the hemlock and killing himself does not make us stop and think of Socrates as divine. It is a tragic ending. We are moved to sympathy. Yet nothing impels us to conclude from the sheer wisdom of Socrates that he is god-like. Socrates also is not actually known for any particular teaching. Rather, he is known today for *his method* of getting wisdom. He left a legacy of asking the probing question. It is a good legacy. It is not a divine legacy.

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*Jesus: Sympathizer with the Common Man*

Jesus was a carpenter 2,000 years ago. He had no human wealth. His followers were pupils, not an armed band. His pupils' background were as fishermen, not as theologians.

Jesus' main agenda on the surface appeared to be a vigorous attack on the religious authorities. Who were these leaders? Rome captured Judea in 66 B.C. Herod became Judea's puppet-ruler for Rome. Herod in turn appointed the High Priest over the Jerusalem Temple. As a result, the High Priest's followers known as the Sadducees became corrupted by attachment to their Herodian bosses. It is in this context that Jesus condemned the ruling religious authorities. His strong words were not an attack on Jews or Judaism or the Law.

In fact, Jesus' aim was far from seeking to end the Law of Moses or attack Judaism *per se*. Rather, Jesus told the religious authorities that they had made their oral teachings more important than the Law given by God through Moses. As a result, the religious rulers put burdens on the people that were oppressive. In other cases, however, they shifted the Law's direction for their own benefit. For example, Jesus excoriated them for devising an oral tradition which excused duties to help one's parents so long as the Temple treasury received a special payment. Jesus was outraged at this self-interested alteration. The religious leaders also exaggerated commands to rest on the Sabbath. The people became afraid to lift a finger to do good on the Sabbath. Jesus was also furious that the religious rulers allowed commercial exchanges inside the Temple area itself. They lost the sense of hallowed ground that belonged to the Temple.

The second major focus of Jesus' work was a concern for the poor, the oppressed, the ill, and the lame. He spent His time with those who everyone else ignored as social outcasts: lepers, tax collectors, and drinkers. There is no money to gain from such people. Jesus' goals were not aimed at any worldly achievements.

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*Jesus' Agenda Conflicts with the Religious Rulers*

Finally, Jesus was accused of heresy by the religious leaders. They picked up stones against Him because He dared to make Himself “equal with God.” (John 5:18.) The religious authorities also accused Jesus to Pilate as being a subversive. They claimed Jesus wanted to be recognized as “king of the Jews,” implying Jesus wanted an immediate overthrow of Caesar. Jesus told His disciples that this was not true. Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom was “not of this world.” Pilate realized Jesus posed no political threat. With his wife claiming a vision told her Jesus was innocent, Pilate was anxious to release Jesus. The crowd was stirred up by the High Priest in anger against Jesus. Pilate relented to their wishes, caught in the cross-hairs of politics himself. The High Priest directly told him that if he should release Jesus, he (Pilate) was no friend of Caesar’s. Thus, if Pilate released Jesus, the High Priest was suggesting Pilate was guilty of treason to Rome.

In the end, Jesus was killed by His wealthy religious opponents: Temple leaders who were serving Rome at that time which history proves were also lining their pockets from temple funds. The religious leaders had become angered by Jesus’ many corrections of their oppressive and wrong teachings about the Law.

For many years after Jesus’ departure, the only ones who accepted Jesus’ message for religious reformation were Jews. *Many myriades*, which means many *tens of thousands*, among the Jews came to believe, James told Paul. This statement was about fourteen years after Paul had joined the Christian movement. Thus, *many myriades* implies at least *three*. So *three myriades* would be 30,000.

Yet, during most of this time, none of the apostles thought to preach to Gentiles. The idea of offering the gospel to Gentiles was something the apostles had to be prodded into doing. As recorded in the book of Acts by Dr. Luke, in Acts 10, Peter, prompted by a vision, went to preach to Cornelius, a centurion. He was the first Gentile to join the apostolic church.

This in essence is a biography of Jesus' life without considering any of the claims about the miraculous. Yet, His biography is its own miracle.

