

The Life and Teachings of Jesus

According to the New Testament

Jesus was born in Bethlehem*. Galilee was his childhood home.*

Jesus' mother was Mary. Two of the Gospels, Matthew and Luke, but not Mark or John, are interpreted to allege that Joseph was Jesus' foster father, and that Jesus' biological father was the Holy Spirit, who mystically caused Mary to conceive, giving rise to a virgin birth. The other two Gospels, Mark and John, make no mention of Joseph at all, but in their first chapters refer to Jesus as the son of God. Nothing is certain about Jesus' childhood or young adulthood*. Certain events are mentioned in the various Gospels, but there is no common agreement.

The Gospel of Mark reports that Jesus had brothers, that he was "Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon," and also suggests that Jesus had sisters. The Jewish historian Josephus and the Christian historian Eusebius (who wrote in the 4th century but quoted much earlier sources now unavailable to us) refer to James the Just as Jesus' brother. Some churches reject this interpretation, saying that they were Jesus' cousins, which the Greek word for "brother" used in the Gospels would allow. The Gnostic Acts of Thomas identifies the Apostle Thomas as Jesus' twin brother. Other churches suggest that these were step brothers, children of Joseph and a previous wife who died before Mary was betrothed to him. This tradition probably originates with the Protevangelion of James, traditionally ascribed to James the Just and certainly dated sometime in the late 1st to middle of the 2nd century.

Some have interpreted Gnostic texts like the Gospel of Philip to suggest that Mary Magdalene was the wife of Jesus. The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions do not record any wife of Jesus; the Roman Catholic hagiography of Mary Magdalene says that she traveled to France and lived the life of an ascetic. The Eastern Orthodox synaxarion says that she continued preaching the Gospel in various places, eventually settling in Ephesus to work with John the Evangelist.

The Evangelists do not describe much of Jesus' life between birth and the beginning of his ministry, except that as a young teen he instructed the scholars in the temple. The apocryphal Infancy Gospels describe the child Jesus performing miraculous works. The 19th-century Russian scholar Nicolai Notovich suggested, based on a document he claimed to see in a Ladakh monastery, that Jesus traveled the world, including India, as an adolescent and youth, and was exposed to religious traditions such as Buddhism. However, the monastery Jesus is alleged to have studied at in India was not built until the 16th century, and there is no independent evidence confirming the story. This theory is not considered orthodox by any major Christian church.

Jesus began his public ministry some time after he was baptized by John the Baptist, who perhaps unwittingly inspired Mandaeanism. Jesus began preaching, teaching, and healing. There is no firm evidence for when his ministry started or how long it lasted. The detailed nature of Jesus' spiritual teaching cannot be fully agreed because accounts are fragmentary and because he made extensive use of paradox, metaphor and parable; making it unclear how literally he wished to be taken and precisely what he meant.

Jesus did preach the imminent end of the current era of history, in some sense a literal end of the world as people of his time knew it; in this sense he was an apocalyptic preacher bringing a message about the imminent end of the world the Jews knew.

Jesus opposed stringent interpretations of Jewish law, and preached a more flexible understanding of the law. His teachings show an inclination to following a teleological approach, in which the spirit of the law is more important than the letter of the law, and the Gospels record him as having many disagreements with the Pharisees.

Although the interpretations of the law by the Sadducees were in most cases much stricter than Pharisee interpretations of the law, and the Sadducees were the dominant authority at that time, yet the Gospels record no sign of Jesus having much disagreement with their views (although it was, according to the Gospels, the priests – aligned with the Sadducees – who ultimately arrested Jesus). A few modern scholars thus believe that Jesus may have been an Essene (a sect with whom he shared many views); and that later Christian transcribers cast him as an enemy of the Pharisees, because when Christians and Jews came into conflict in later years the Pharisees had become the dominant sect of Judaism. This view receives some support in Acts of the Apostles, because Jesus' apostles were generally attacked by Sadducees but were sometimes protected by Pharisee liberal interpretations of Jewish law.

Jesus increasingly gained followers as his fame grew, though within his lifetime Jesus' core following remained no more than a small religious sect. Jesus had by the time of his death taught a number of his disciples or apostles to preach his teachings and perform faith healing to both Jews and Gentiles alike.

In his role as a social reformer Jesus threatened the status quo. He was unpopular with many Jewish religious authorities. According to the Gospels, this was because he criticised them, and, moreover, because some of Jesus' followers held the controversial and inflammatory view that he was "The Messiah". It is not clear from strict analysis of the original Gospel texts that Jesus made this claim about himself, but he did not deny it. Neither is it wholly clear to scholars that when Jesus spoke of being "Son of God" he meant this to be taken literally as Christians believe, rather than metaphorically in the sense that we are all children of God. Scholars currently suggest that whether Jesus claimed to be a political rebel or not, Jewish authorities would very likely have feared that his activities would provoke a riot in Jerusalem – something Roman authorities absolutely forbade.

Jesus came with his followers to Jerusalem during the Passover festival. He was involved in a public disturbance at the Temple in Jerusalem when he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and broke open the cages of animals to be sacrificed. At some point later, he was betrayed to the Jewish religious authorities of the city – either the full council (Sanhedrin) or perhaps just the High Priest – by one of his apostles, Judas Iscariot. The High Priest of the city was appointed by the government in Rome and the current holder of the post was Joseph Caiphas. The Romans ruled the city through the High Priest and Sanhedrin, so often the Jewish authorities of the city had to arrest people in order to obey Roman orders to maintain the peace. Jesus' disciples went into hiding after he was arrested.

Jesus was crucified by the Romans on the orders of Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judea in Jerusalem. The Gospels state that he did this at the behest of the Jewish religious leaders, but it may have been simply that Pilate considered Jesus' ability to incite public disturbance as a potential Messiah to be a threat to Roman order. Pilate was known as a harsh ruler who ordered many executions for lesser reasons during his reign (then again, he'd been in trouble twice with his Roman superiors for being too harsh in his rule). Furthermore, the plaque placed on the cross was used by the Romans to detail the crime of the crucified individual. In the case of Jesus the plaque reads "Iesvs Nazarenvs Rex Iudaeorum" (INRI)—"Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews", indicating that Jesus was crucified for the crime of rebelling against the authority of Rome by being declared the "King of the Jews".

All the Gospel accounts agree that Joseph of Arimathea, variously a secret disciple or sympathiser to Jesus, and possible member of the Sanhedrin, arranged with Pilate for the body to be taken down and entombed. According to most accounts Jesus' mother, Mary, and other women, notably a female follower of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, were present during this process.

The Nazarenes of Mount Carmel

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