



**LOYOLA INSTITUTE | RE REVISION
DAY 2016**

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Christianity: Origins &
Contemporary
Expressions

JESUS AS MESSIAH: MESSIANIC EXPECTATION

Context: First Century Palestine

- By the time of Jesus' birth, Jewish history had for centuries taught that a Messiah would bring about a new era of global peace.
- The Jews believed that the Messiah would come to save them from the oppressive political power occupying the Holy Land. (Rome at the time of Jesus).

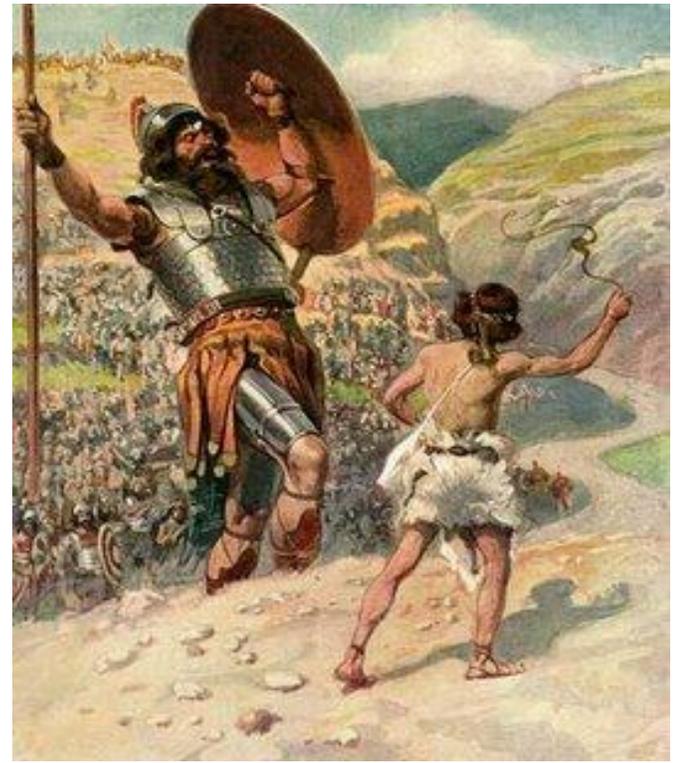
"Messiah" / "Anointed One"

- Understood differently at the time of Jesus:
 1. Davidic Messiah
 2. Prophetic Messiah
 3. Priestly Messiah



DAVIDIC MESSIAH

- The Messiah would be a new King David, who would deliver Israel from foreign rule and restore the former glories of the time of King David's rule.
- The Messiah would be a leader who would guide them into battle against foreign forces occupying Palestine.
- The Three Wise Men believed that Jesus was the political leader they had been waiting for to rule over the kingdom of Israel



PROPHETIC MESSIAH

- The Zealots looked forward to a Messiah whom God would send to expel the Romans from Palestine and restore the Kingdom of God to the chosen people.
 - Some of the apostles were Zealots and initially followed Jesus in the belief that he would lead them in a violent revolution and liberate them from oppression just like Moses had freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt



PRIESTLY MESSIAH

- The Essenes also looked forward to the coming of Messiah. They were preoccupied with a heavenly Messiah, who would bring a heavenly Kingdom. The Essenes hoped the Messiah would find people who were prepared to re-establish the true priesthood and kingship of David and to battle the forces of spiritual darkness. Their mission was to prepare the way for the Messiah and to bring spiritual light to the world.

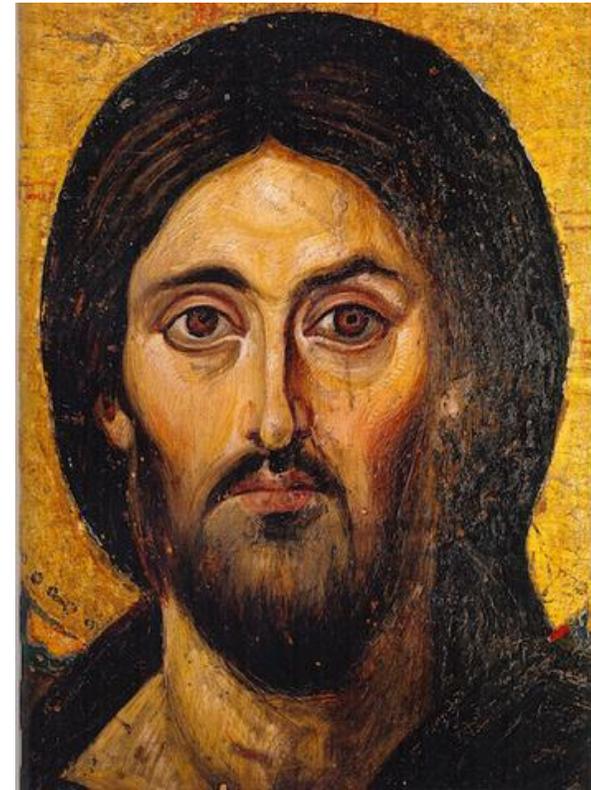
Note: The Essenes are the one Jewish sect not mentioned in the New Testament!



THE MESSIANIC SECRET

- Jesus himself never permitted his followers to describe him as “Messiah” – something which has become to be known as “the Messianic Secret” (a phrase coined by the German New Testament scholar William Wrede, 1859-1906).
- If Jesus regarded himself as Messiah, it was not in the politicized way that was associated with Zealot or other strongly nationalist circles.
- The Contemporary expectation was of a victorious messiah. The fact that Jesus was crucified was a problem!

If Jesus was a messiah, he was not the kind of messiah that people were expecting



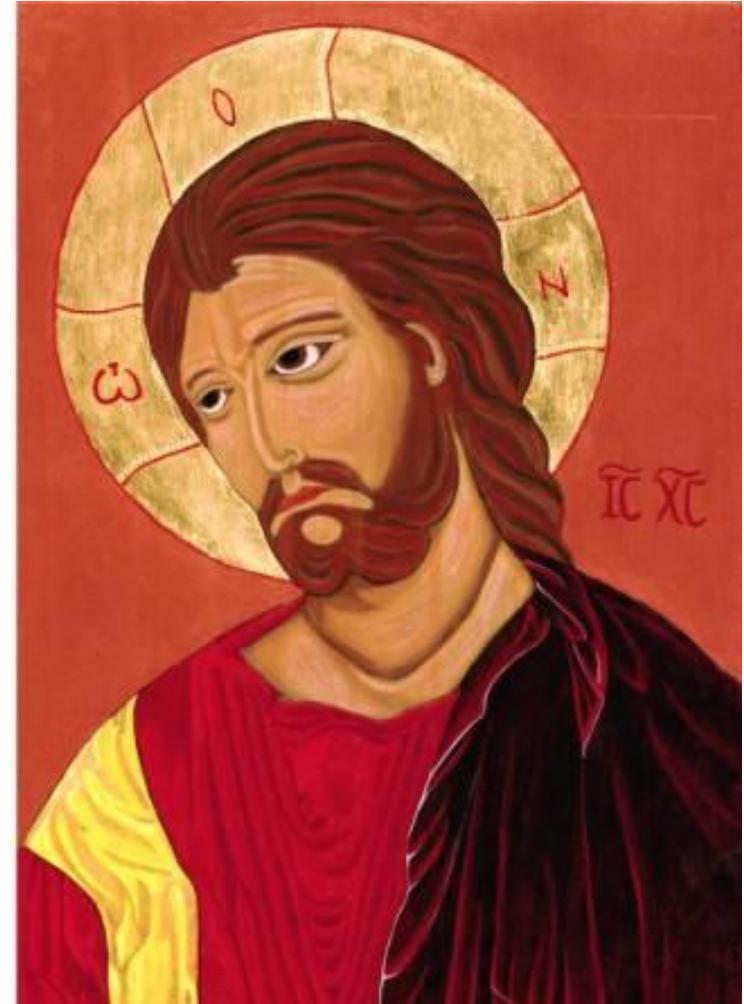
JESUS' IDENTITY & MISSION

Jesus was fully aware of the messianic expectations the Jewish people had at this time. Don't forget, Jesus is a Jew!

→ Jesus, too, expected a future figure to be the messiah, a human ruler of God's kingdom, and saw himself not as God but as the prophet at the end of time, predicting that the messiah was soon to appear

Titles for Jesus:

1. Lord: The divine name YHWH is so sacred it cannot be said out loud. Thus, "Lord" was used in its place.
2. Son of Man: Refers to the ideal human, the one most faithful to YHWH.
3. Son of God: Used many ways (to refer to someone who is holy, who obeys God's will).



SO, HOW DO WE KNOW ABOUT JESUS?

- The sources for the study of Christian history in its first 1500 years are unevenly distributed in terms of period and language.
 - For the earliest period, there is little or no material evidence, and the literary evidence is sparse.

Our richest literary (and material) evidence comes from within the Roman Empire and uses Greek and Latin.

Our sources are uneven in terms of their perspective

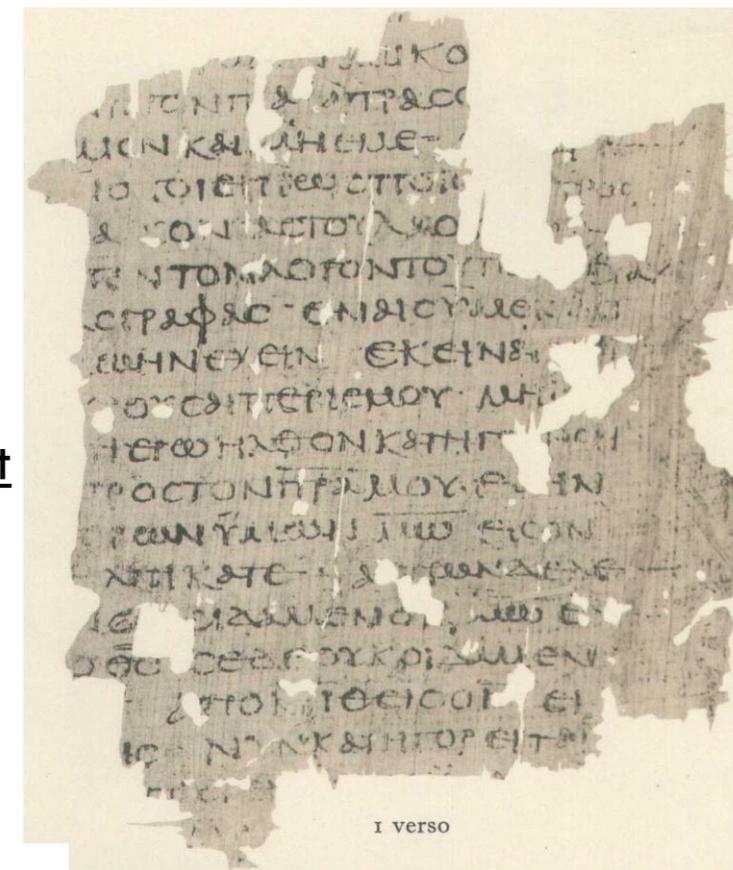
- With some few exceptions, the majority of evidence comes from insider rather than outsider sources



SOURCES: PRIMARY

The reason there have been so many disagreements about Jesus is that our earliest sources about his life – the New Testament Gospels – are not fully accurate representations of his words and deeds and are highly problematic for reconstructing the events of his life

1. There are no other *early* sources for knowing about Jesus
2. The Gospels are usually dated to 35 to 65 years after Jesus' death
3. They were not written by eyewitnesses but by Greek-speaking Christians living outside of Palestine decades later
4. It is almost certain that the authors of the Gospels wrote down stories that had long been part of the oral tradition. As these stories had circulated by word of mouth over the decades since Jesus' death, they were changed – sometimes radically – and some were invented



SOURCES: PRIMARY

- Scholars have had to establish rigorous historical criteria to help evaluate the Gospels as sources in order to determine what we can actually know about the life of the historical Jesus.
- ❖ Stories or sayings of Jesus that do not simply express what the Christian storytellers would have wanted to say about him (or even that go against what later Christians said about him) are more likely to be authentic – because those stories and sayings would not have been made up
- Any story or saying of Jesus must plausibly fit in the historical context within which he lived – 1st Century Palestine – if it is to be accepted as historically accurate.
- Scholars who have applied these criteria come to different conclusions!

However, one understanding of the historical Jesus has dominated scholarly discussions – the understanding that *Jesus was, and understood himself to be, an apocalyptic prophet*.

AN APOCALYPTIC PROPHET

Definition: Apocalypticism was an ancient Jewish theology that insisted that this world was controlled by forces of evil, but that God would soon intervene in history to overthrow those forces and usher in a good kingdom, in which there would be no more pain, misery, or suffering

- Jewish apocalypticists believed that God had revealed or unveiled to them the heavenly secrets of what was soon to take place on earth, when he would destroy all that were opposed to him and bring in his kingdom

This worldview was dominant in 1st Century Judaism



The Four Components

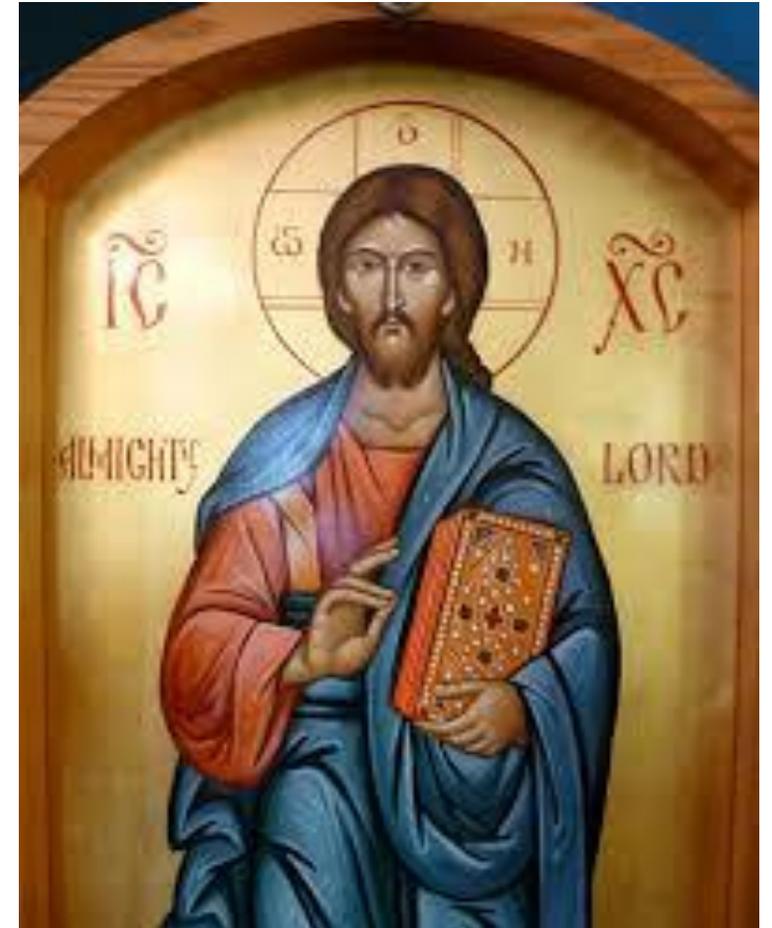
1. Dualism: Good & Evil
2. Pessimism: This age was controlled by evil powers
3. Vindication: God was about to overthrow evil
4. Imminence: This was to happen very soon!

JESUS AS PROPHET

Jesus appears to have held these apocalyptic views:

These are the ideas he proclaimed in our earliest surviving sources, especially the three earliest Gospels

- The Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke
Note: These are called Synoptic Gospels because they are so similar to one another that they can be “seen together” – the literal meaning of *synoptic*.
- Mark is the earliest Gospel c. 65-70 C.E. and was used by Matthew and Luke for many of their stories about Jesus c. 80-85 C.E.



JESUS AS PROPHET: KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus' preaching focuses on the coming Kingdom of God

- A real Kingdom on earth, where the righteous would be rewarded but the wicked excluded. This Kingdom would be brought by the Son of Man, a cosmic judge from heaven.
- ❖ Jesus almost certainly did not think of himself as the Son of Man
 - ❖ It's true that in the Gospels, he calls himself by that name, but we must remember that the Gospels are Christian texts written by Christian authors. These authors had heard their stories about Jesus from Christian storytellers, and for decades, the stories, including the sayings of Jesus, had been changed.
- The later storytellers believed that Jesus was the Son of Man, and thus, naturally, when they told their stories about Jesus' teaching, he gives himself that name. However, in some of Jesus' teachings, he appears to be talking about someone else. It is those sayings about the Son of Man that appear to go back to Jesus himself, not to his later followers.

JESUS AS PROPHET: KINGDOM OF GOD

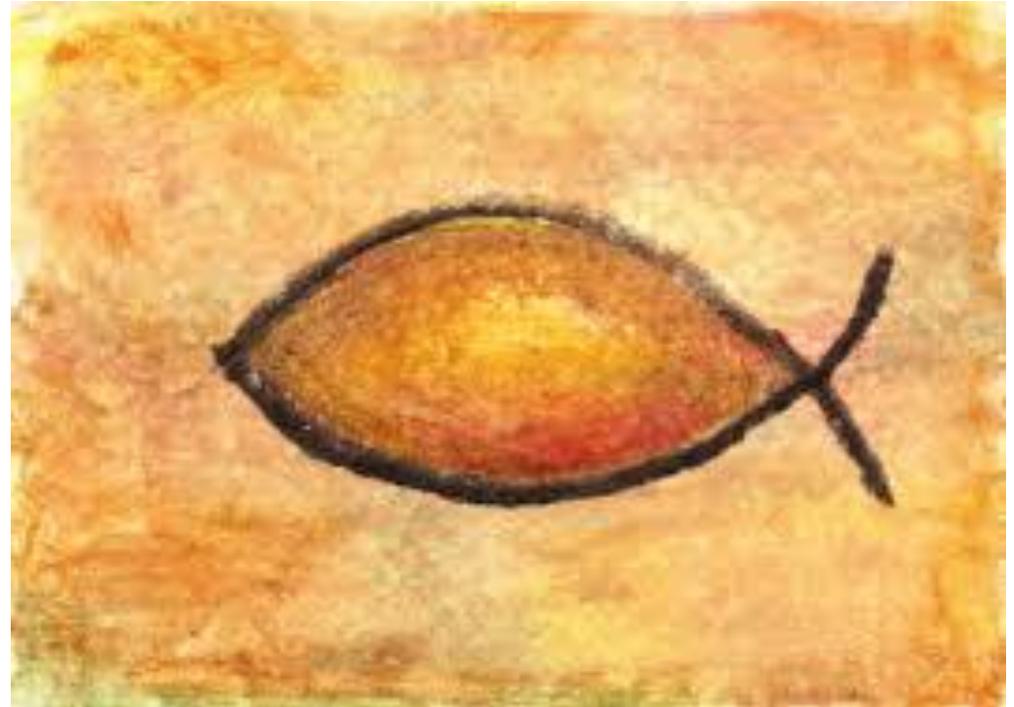
Jesus speaks about a future cosmic judge of the earth who would bring destruction prior to the appearance of God's Kingdom

- In the Kingdom, people must obey God's will as expressed in Scripture, by loving their neighbours as themselves, and by trusting God as a child trusts a good parent
- The 12 disciples would be rulers in the future kingdom.
- The Son of Man was to appear very soon; the kingdom of God was imminent.
- Those who followed Jesus' teachings of love and mercy and justice and compassion were already beginning to see what the Kingdom would be like in the here and now.



JESUS AS PROPHET: KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus was a Jewish apocalypticist, one who expected the imminent end of history as we know it and the miraculous arrival of a judge from heaven, who would bring in God's utopian kingdom here on earth



WHAT ABOUT SECULAR SOURCES OF EVIDENCE FOR JESUS OF NAZARETH?

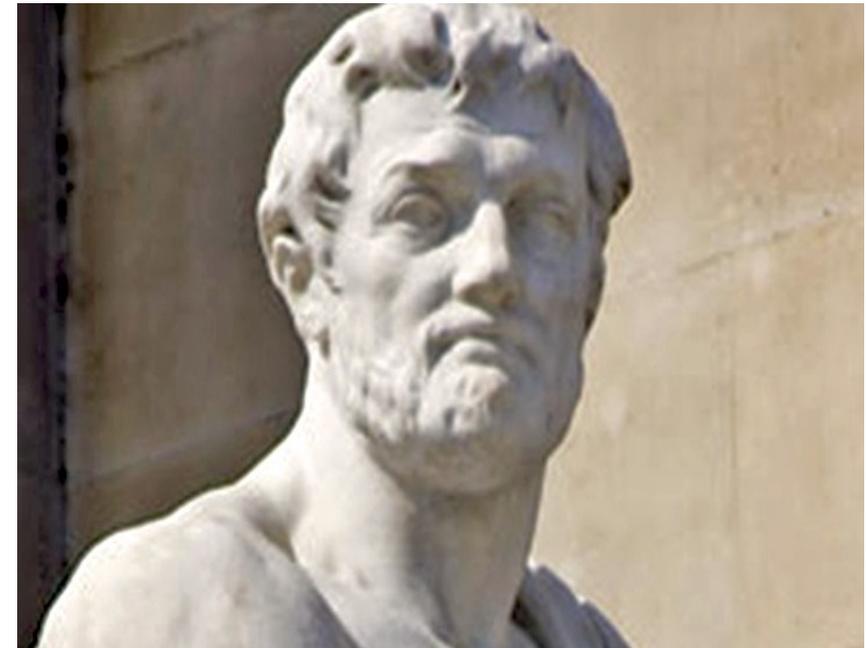
There are three Roman writers who explicitly mention the “Christian question” in the second century

Pliny: The governor of the Roman province of Bithynia in Asia Minor. He wrote a famous letter in 112 C.E. to the Emperor Trajan asking advice on how to deal with people called “Christians.” He says that they were fooled by a “degraded and extravagant superstition.” According to Pliny, Christians refused to offer sacrifices to the emperor for which they deserved punishment. Pliny also talks about some of the Christian practices: “meeting before dawn on an appointed day, and saying with one another a form of words to Christ, as if to a god.” Pliny ultimately denounces the “superstition” as a “contagion spreading through villages and country, till the temples were emptied of worshippers.”



SECULAR SOURCES

Tacitus: A friend of Pliny's. Tacitus was documenting the history of the Emperors in Rome (the famous *Annals*). He had to document the reign of Nero (54-68 C.E.) and the Great Fire of 64 C.E. in his work. Rumour had it that the Emperor had started the fire (and played the violin as the City burned). Tacitus had to find another explanation – a scapegoat – the “Christians.” Tacitus writes: The author of that profession was Christ, who, in the reign of Tiberius, was capitally punished by the procurator, Pontius Pilate. The deadly superstition, though checked for a while, broke out afresh; and that, not only throughout Judea, the original seat of the evil, but through the city . . . a vast multitude were convicted, not so much for the firing of the city, as of hatred of mankind” (*Annals*, XV, 44). This is an account of the beginnings of Christianity in the execution of Jesus under the Roman Governor of Judea.



WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT JESUS' LIFE FROM OUR SOURCES?

Jesus' ministry in rural Palestine lasted from only one to three years, reached a limited number of people, and ended in apparent failure, with the abandonment of his followers, and his execution by Roman authorities.

- With the highest degree of probability, Jesus was a 1st-century Palestinian Jew who was executed by the Romans around the year 30 C.E. and in whose name, shortly thereafter, a movement arose and spread across the Mediterranean, generating writings in a variety of literary genres.
- With a very high degree of probability, patterns of his activity can be determined: He spoke of God's rule, taught in parables, worked wonders, interpreted Torah, associated with marginal elements of his society, and chose 12 followers as disciples.
- With a high degree of probability, it can be stated that Jesus was baptized by John, that he performed a prophetic gesture in the Temple, and that he was opposed by elements of the Jewish leadership.
- Although these statements are significant, they fall short of providing a narrative or supplying the self-understanding and aims of Jesus beyond what is provided by the Gospels.

WE KNOW THE MOST ABOUT JESUS' LAST YEARS



There are two virtually certain facts about Jesus' death (which occurred approx. 30 C.E.):

1. He was crucified by the Romans on the orders of the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate
2. The charges against him were **political** – he had been calling himself King of the Jews.

JESUS AND PASSOVER



It is virtually certain that Jesus spent almost his entire public ministry in the northern part of the land, in Galilee, proclaiming the coming Kingdom of God

It is also virtually certain that in the last week of his life, he made a trip to Jerusalem with his disciples to celebrate the feast of Passover

- Passover is an annual festival celebrated by Jews to commemorate the formative event of the nation of Israel: its escape from slavery in Egypt under the powerful hand of Moses. It involves a special meal consisting of symbolic foods that helped the participants remember the story, as told in the book of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible. Many Jews believed that to celebrate it properly required them to come to Jerusalem and participate in the sacrifice of the Passover lambs in the Temple, lambs that were then taken home and eaten at the Passover meal.

JESUS AND PASSOVER



Many people came to Jerusalem during Passover

It was a time of tension and danger, especially for the Roman occupiers of the land of Israel:

- The festival commemorated the time when God had saved Israel from the oppressive hand of a foreign power, and many Jews participated in the feast not merely looking back to what God had done but also to ***what he would do*** to deliver them from Rome.
- The Romans understood this!
 - This was one time of the year when the Roman governor would come to the city from his residence in Caesarea, bringing troops to station around the city to quell any possible riots.

JESUS AND PASSOVER



Key Question: In all sources, in the last week of Jesus' life, he went to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. Why?

- ❖ Was it to die for the sins of the world? That would be a theological answer!
- ❖ Historical answer? Jesus had been proclaiming his message in the remote, rural areas of Galilee; he was now bringing his message to the heart of the Jewish nation, the Jewish people, and the Jewish religion – to Jerusalem at Passover.
- ❖ Evidence that this was his purpose is found in the Gospels: It is during this week that he preaches most forcefully his message of the coming destruction to be brought by the Son of Man before the appearance of God's future Kingdom.

EVENTS IN JERUSALEM



There is little doubt about what Jesus did when he first arrived in the city of Jerusalem, on what was possibly his first visit.

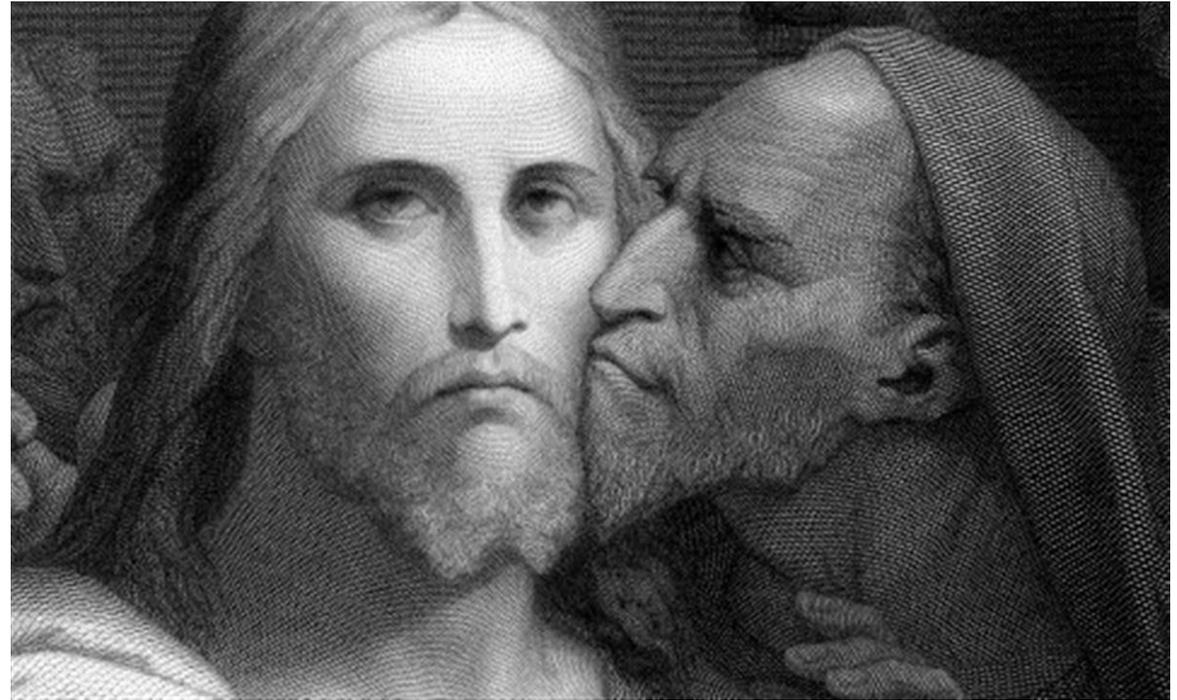
He entered the enormous Temple compound, found what was happening there disturbing, and began to overturn the tables and attack some of the Jews who were helping to run the Temple cult.

- It is no wonder that these Jewish leaders – who probably had never heard of Jesus before – did not take kindly to him or his message. And they no doubt saw his actions could indeed create a following; the masses were eager to hear how God was soon to intervene in their situation.
- Thus, the Jewish leaders – the chief priests and the members of the ruling council (the Sanhedrin) – kept a close eye on Jesus. Ultimately, they believed they had to act to remove him from the public eye. But how were they to do so without causing a disturbance that could lead to even more trouble?

EVENTS IN JERUSALEM

The sources are consistent in stating that the Jewish authorities bribed one of Jesus' closest disciples, Judas Iscariot, to betray him.

- ❖ There is no doubt that Jesus was killed by the Romans, not the Jews, and that his execution was for political treason – for calling himself the King of the Jew.
 - All messianic claimants were routinely killed for political insurgency.



THE CONSEQUENCES?

The death of Jesus must have radically disconfirmed for the disciples what they had thought of him.

- Remember: No ancient Jew imagined that the messiah would be one who would die for the sake of others. Instead, the messiah was to be the great and powerful deliverer of his people from their foreign oppressor.

During Jesus' lifetime, his disciples may have thought that he was to be king of the coming kingdom – the great and powerful messiah – but after his death, it seemed clear that he was not.

- He had not overthrown the enemy but was destroyed the enemy. He had not established a new kingdom but was executed by the rulers of the present kingdom.

Therefore, the death of Jesus must have sent his followers into despair

- ❖ A despair that would only disappear when they came to think that God had raised him from the dead!



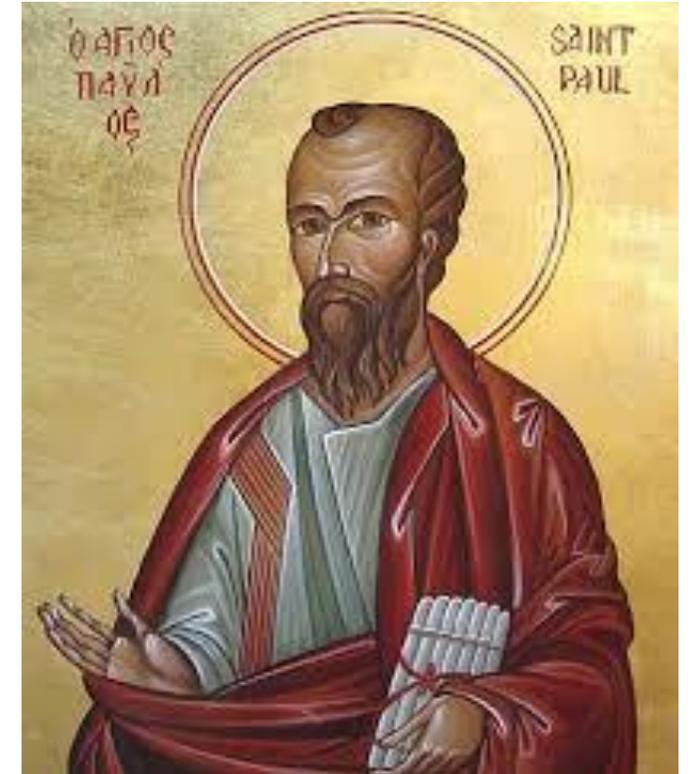
JESUS' RESURRECTION

According to the earliest Christian writings, Christianity did not begin with what Jesus said and did before his death. It began with experiences of Jesus after his death by his followers in a new mode of existence: As resurrected from the dead and exalted to God's presence, Jesus is "Lord" and "Christ."

Paul's letters provide evidence for the claims made by the first believers, which are all the more startling because they were at odds with believers' empirical circumstances.

❖ Believers claimed to have been saved; this salvation is not, in the New Testament, a future or a hoped-for state but a present reality.

The Resurrection of Jesus is not an event of the past but a condition of the present, not something that happened only to Jesus but *also* to his followers



JESUS' RESURRECTION

- Because of this experience, believers saw themselves “in Christ.” They saw themselves not only as a “new covenant” within Judaism but as a “new creation” and a “new humanity.”
- Jesus was not simply a messiah for Jews but was the “image of God” for all humans. This claim to the experience of divine power in an immediate and transforming fashion marked the first Christians and accounted—much more than their moral teaching or manner of life—for their appeal to others. That a human being had joined the divine realm as a “son of God” and was a lord and benefactor to humans would not have seemed strange to Gentiles.
- To Jews, the claim that Jesus was a messiah was not theoretically a problem, but the claim that he was **Lord** made his followers appear as polytheists and, therefore, as heretics.

IN CONCLUSION...

We must realise that there are numerous incidents in the Gospels that we cannot know about or that we cannot accept as historically certain.

- ❖ What is certain is that Jesus was executed by Pilate for calling himself King of the Jews.
- ❖ This unexpected turn of events must have driven the disciples of Jesus into deep despair...until they came to believe that God had reversed the judgment of the world by raising Jesus from the dead.
- ❖ This reversal led the disciples to proclaim that far from being a discredited messiah, Jesus had been made divine.