

192 Jesus – Fact or Friction

An irritating historical conundrum

(Here's the first draft of the introduction of a booklet that I'm planning to write for people who show some interest in the Christian faith.)

Historical sources seem to indicate that Jesus was born into a Jewish peasant family from an obscure middle eastern village. As a baby, he was a refugee, as his parents fled persecution. On their return, he grew up in another small village, where he worked as a carpenter until he was about 30. Then, for three years, he became an itinerant preacher.

At first, people hung on his every word, but he was extremely critical of the Jewish religious leaders, who then managed to turn public opinion against him, and got the Romans on their side. He was arrested, tried and sentenced to death. He was publicly flogged and hung on a Roman cross to die.

His close friends hid behind locked doors, for fear they would be next. However, just a few weeks later they went public again, preaching to the people – as Jesus had – about 'good news', but this time making the claim that Jesus had 'come back from the dead'. They insisted that hundreds of them had seen him alive and that they were telling the truth, even when they themselves began to be persecuted, arrested, flogged and some even killed.

They continued to say, as Jesus had said, that they had 'good news' about a new 'kingdom' and about Jesus being a special 'king'. Despite the persecution, this 'good news' spread, their story soon coming to be believed even by non-Jews. It spread from country to country, and in a matter of a few decades there were people calling themselves followers of Jesus all around the known world.

Currently, there are about 2.5 billion people who say they follow Jesus and believe this 'good news'. The best-selling book in the whole world is the life story of this one obscure Jewish peasant preacher, and it has been translated into more different languages than any other book, ever. The texts of the Bible – and related historical documents – have been studied by scholars, academics and physical archaeologists, and translations of the story have been read and appreciated by billions of people for almost 2000 years.

If the above summary is even moderately accurate then the story of Jesus has had an unparalleled effect on the history of the whole human race – for good or ill.

But then again, maybe the whole story of Jesus is just made-up wishful thinking.

Maybe.