

God with Us: Christ in All the Gospels-1

by Desmond Ford

*One of the great evidences that Jesus is
divine is found in the providential way the
world was prepared for his arrival*



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here is a shortcut to solving the mystery of existence.

Blaise Pascal [1623-62], the French genius who did the groundwork for computers, said, "Without Christ we do not know what God is. Or ourselves. Or life or death."

The Right Generation

There has only been one other gen-

eration in history similar to our own. Rome, in the first century.

That, too, was a barbarous and violent generation yet with a very sophisticated culture. It was a generation with only one superpower.

The family unit was collapsing. Suicide was pandemic. Human life was cheap. The poet said,

On that hard pagan world
disgust and deep weariness fell.

Weariness and sated lust
had made of life a hell,
and to that hell came Jesus of
Nazareth.

The Right Time

Jesus gave this opening sentence to the world. "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news" (Mk 1:15 NIV).

There are two words for “time” in the Greek language, kairos and chronos. Chronos means “time in duration,” but the word Jesus uses here is kairos, or “crisis time.” It’s special time, a harvesttime. When Jesus says, “The time has come” [is fulfilled], he is saying, “This is a crisis. This is the watershed of the ages.”

Jesus Christ came at the right time.

It was the time of *pax Romana*, the first time in centuries there had been comparative peace between the nations (enforced by Rome).

It was the time when, because of the conquests of Alexander the Great, there was a universal language, Greek. (Jesus spoke at least two languages, Greek and Aramaic.)

It was a time when travel was possible in a way not possible earlier.

Jesus came at the right time.

The Right Place

Jesus came to the right place.

There was no place in the world so appropriate as Palestine for the Son of God to come to.

It was the landbridge between the three great continents of the then-known world: Europe, Asia, and Africa.

People going down to the great civilization of Egypt had to pass through Palestine. People going up to the sophisticated center of culture, Greece, had to pass through Palestine. Travelers going to Rome, the center of government, had to pass through Palestine.

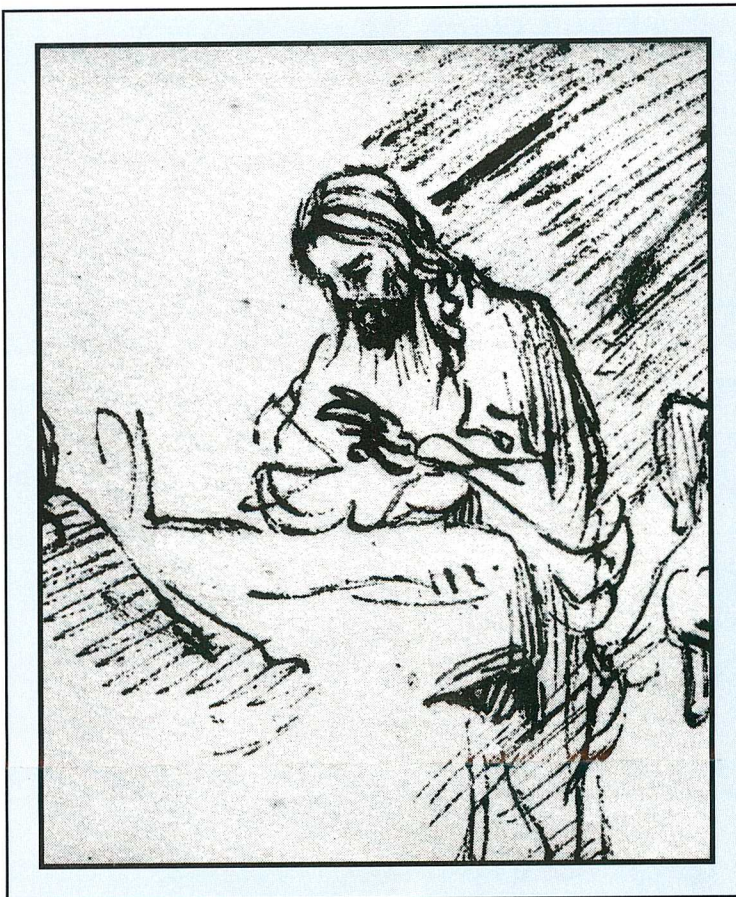
Palestine is not just a land bridge, however. It is a miniworld.

Many don’t realize how small Palestine is—smaller than Vermont or Maine. (For those from “down under,” smaller than Tasmania.)

Yet it is a miniworld.

It has a unique geological formation that gives it the climate of every

part of the globe. The Jordan Valley is a section that has dropped hundreds of feet. Because of this geological cleft, it’s a land of tremendous seismic activity.



The Dead Sea is about 1300 feet below sea level, while Jerusalem—half an hour away—is thousands of feet above sea level. You can leave the snows of Jerusalem in December (as I have done), and go down to where the climate is almost tropical. Then you can go on and swim in the Dead Sea. You won’t sink and drown in the Dead Sea, because the mineral content is 28 percent. (As soon as the fish from the Jordan River swim into it, they die.)

In the 140 miles from Mount Hermon to the Dead Sea you drop 10,000 feet. You leave the snows and come to semi-tropical verdure. You go on to the desert. So this country has the flora and fauna of all countries. Everybody is at home when they read the Bible.

It doesn’t matter where you come from. Some of the vegetables, flowers, and animals in the Bible are familiar

to you.

Egypt, nearby, has only one climate. A consistent heat. But the tiny country of Palestine is hot in one place, cold not far away, and not much farther away, quite temperate.

The Place of Parable

It is a land of parable.

The great geological cleft illustrates human nature, the big cleft in all of us. We are born with a cleft because of humanity’s rebellion against the Creator.

We are born with great depths of potential for evil. We also have potential for great heights because we are made in God’s image.

I put my fingers in the beautiful, sparkling Sea of Galilee. It takes water from Hermon, and takes to give.

The life that takes to give—just as the Sea of Galilee—is glowing, full of life, full of beauty.

How different is the Dead Sea. Why does everything in it die? Why does it have 28 percent lethal chemicals? Because it takes but does not give.

The Dead Sea and its environs are depressing. Sodom and Gomorrah probably lie beneath those poisoned waters.

The life that takes and never gives—just as the Dead Sea—is gloomy, fatal, death-dealing.

Palestine is a land of parable.

Place Names

Even the names are right.

Bethlehem, where Jesus was born, means, “house of Bread.”

Nazareth, where he was brought up, means, “the place of the Branch.” The Old Testament foretold the Messiah would be a Branch (Isa 11:1). Jesus is also a Branch of the Godhead.

Capernaum, Jesus’ own city, means, “the town of consolation.” What a consolation to have Jesus present! Anointed with the oil of gladness he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil (Acts 10:38).

Bethsaida, where Jesus called his disciples to be fishers of men, means, “the house of fishing.”

Bethesda, where Jesus healed the man sick for 40 years, means, “the house of mercy.”

Bethany, where the triumphal entry began, and people strewed the road with branches from date palms, means, “the house of palm dates.”

Gethsemane, where Jesus was bruised for our sake as God made him sin for us, means, “the place of the olive press.” The beginnings of the Passion of Calvary were in Gethsemane. There his soul was pressed above measure. He said, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death” (Mt 26:38).

The Kedron brook, which Jesus had to cross to get to Gethsemane, means, “dark waters.” Dark, indeed.

One thousand years earlier his ancestor David had crossed that brook, gone through Gethsemane up to the Mount of Olives. He went barefoot, weeping, with his head covered (2 Samuel 15). Where King David had gone—despised and rejected of men—the Son of God goes, over Kedron, into Gethsemane, on his way to Calvary.

Golgotha is Calvary’s Hebrew name. It means “the place of rolling away,” or “the place of a round thing.” There, at the place that came to be known as “the place of the skull,” Jesus rolled away our sin and shame.

To be a Christian in the world’s sight is to be like a skull—empty-headed, a fool.

It is good to be a fool for the sake of Christ. Sin has turned this world into a cemetery, a place of the skull. But God came down to the place of the skull and rolled away sin, sorrow, and death.

Jesus then ascended from the Mount of Olives. He has gone up on high to extend to sinful, rebellious humanity the olive branch of peace.

So you see, even the place names of Palestine are parable.

Jesus came at the right time, to the right place—a place of parable and place names.



The Right Person

And Jesus is the right person.

We believe in the sun not because we see it, but because we dare not see it. But we believe in the sun because by it we see everything else.

The honest in heart find Jesus to be the Sun of Righteousness. This is because through him we see that everything else makes sense. Without him, nothing we see makes sense.

Pilate asked the right question, “What is truth?” (Jn 18:38). Pilate gave the right answer when he said, “Behold the Man!” (Jn 19:5 KJV).

Pilate’s answer to his own question is that Jesus is the Truth.

Pilate, not being honest, did not see the connection. His wife was wiser. “Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man,” she said (Mt 27:19 NIV). She was not the first wife to ask her husband an impossible thing. It is im-

possible to have nothing to do with Jesus, for if you do not accept him, you really reject him..

If you are dying of poisoning, and the doctor gives you an antidote, you don’t have to curse at it or throw it at the doctors, nurses, or wall. You just have to neglect it, and you will die.

We’ve all been bitten by that old serpent, the devil. We’re all dying. We don’t have to curse Jesus to die. Just neglect him.

It’s an impossibility to have nothing to do with him. Everyone has something to do with Jesus once they have heard of him.

The True Human

Who was he? He was:

The Mightiest among the holy, the Holiest among the mighty.

Jesus was the only well-balanced character who ever lived.

None of us is altogether well balanced. Ask those who live with you, they know!

I don’t know how any husband or father could ever be vain. He lives with people who know him, and the truth

about us is humiliating, because none of us is whole.

Except Jesus!

Jesus was not *sanguine*, as was Peter. Jesus was not *choleric*, as Paul. Not *phlegmatic* as Philip, not *melancholic* as John.

Jesus had the vigor of Paul without the violence. Jesus had the seriousness of John without the depression. Jesus had the easiness of Philip but without the apathy.

Jesus had zeal that never degenerated into passion. He had constancy that never deteriorated into obstinacy. His benevolence was never weakness, and his tenderness never sentimentality.

Jesus was not a bigot, a legalist, or a pietist. He was the Son of Man. He is a true human in the image of God, the only one since Adam and Eve and the Fall.