

The Climactic Moment

God Becomes Man

As the central moment of history drew near, God gave hints to the world of what was to come. Prophets foretold of a coming Savior (whom the Jews called “Messiah”), who would suffer as part of God’s plan.¹ The concept of sacrifice was common throughout ancient cultures and often signified the need for one thing to die so that others could live. The cycle of death and rebirth revealed itself in the seasons of each year, and men made stories to explain why the world followed this pattern.² These and other hints would soon be fulfilled in a dramatic part of God’s plan.

God, the Son, became a human and lived on earth with us. He was born from a human mother named Mary in very humble circumstances. God helped Mary conceive with child even though she was a virgin. Her son was Jewish, born a descendant of Abraham and the famous Israelite king, David. Mary and her husband, Joseph, named the child Jesus.

Jesus was a mystery. He was both God and a man. He was God become a man. Jesus’ consciousness of his own identity was made clear when he said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). His life on earth was marked by life-altering teaching, miraculous healing, compassion towards outcasts, anger over religious hypocrisy, mercy to wrongdoers, devotion to God, prayer, and love. He was wholeheartedly focused on his mission to proclaim that the Kingdom of God was coming; that this event would bring new life to those who accepted it, and that the gateway to this new life was Jesus himself.³

His followers considered him Lord and Savior, but they were confused by his words and actions. They expected an earthly kingdom, centered on the people of Israel. Instead, Jesus spoke about being rejected and killed. He knew that most people would not accept his teaching, and that even his followers would be persecuted. He described becoming his follower as carrying a cross—a Roman instrument of death. But for those who followed him and gave up their own ways, their own lives, he promised new life—both in this life and beyond death.⁴

¹For example, see Isaiah 53.

²See Everett Ferguson’s *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2nd Edition, page 280.

³The stories of Jesus can be found in the first four books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John. They overlap to a degree, but each tells the story from a different viewpoint.

⁴For example, see Mark 8:34-35.

He spoke of a day when God would make the entire world right, when evil would be judged, and that those who believed in him would be saved. He spoke of a counselor, the Holy Spirit, who would come to dwell inside those who followed Jesus. The Spirit would be a seal of God's promises for each Jesus-follower. The Spirit would empower his followers to live in tune with God.

What confused his followers most was when he spoke of resurrection. Many Jews of that time believed that on the world's final day (referred to as "The Day of the Lord"), all people throughout history would be bodily raised to life and that God would judge them.⁵ But Jesus said that he would be resurrected three days after his death, that God would thus vindicate him—showing that, in Jesus, even death was conquered and that Jesus truly was (and is) the Son of God.

And so Jesus was brought to trial in Jerusalem, nearly 2000 years ago, by the religious leaders of that time. They brought false charges against him and asked the Roman government to have him put to death for blasphemy. The governor of Palestine at that time, Pontius Pilate, at first resisted their demand but then yielded to the mobs. He ordered Roman soldiers to have Jesus flogged and then crucified on a cross. Jesus' followers had scattered at his arrest. All but one hid in fear, and his most outspoken follower, Peter, even denied knowing him.

Jesus hung on the cross for six hours until he died. To ensure his death, a soldier stuck a spear in his side. When Jesus died, powerful events shook the land. Darkness filled the sky, an earthquake made Jerusalem tremble, and the holy curtain in the Jerusalem temple tore in half. Jesus was buried in a nearby tomb on the day before the Jewish Sabbath, a holy day of rest.

On Sunday, the day after Sabbath, several women went to the tomb to carry out a Jewish ritual of anointing the dead body. The records report that a heavy stone guarded the tomb's entrance,⁶ and that Roman soldiers had been employed to guard the tomb. God sent an angel to roll back the stone using a violent earthquake. Seeing the angel, the guards fainted. When the women arrived they could not find Jesus' body. They were terrified when the angel appeared to them reporting that Jesus had risen from the grave and that they were to tell his followers the good news.

Jesus, who had been raised to new bodily life, then appeared to his followers on over a dozen occasions during a period of about forty days. More than five hundred

⁵See 2 Peter 3:10.

⁶ See Matthew 28:60. Each of the four Gospels tell the story of Jesus' death.

people witnessed his return.⁷ He assured them that he was no ghost. One doubting follower was even allowed to touch the scars in his hands and side. Jesus commissioned his followers to tell his good news throughout the world—to share that the Creator had made a way to live in tune with God. Jesus spoke to them about the Kingdom of God and that soon he would return to the Father's side. He promised to send them the Holy Spirit. And that is precisely what he did.

⁷1 Corinthians 15:6