

J·E·S·U·S

A Novel of Jesus

by M. C. Ingraham

This book is a novel of fiction; it is not a book of doctrine, or theological or spiritual instruction. The ideas contained are fictional story telling, theories and possibilities.

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Cover image, “Christ at Emmaus” by Jacek Malczewski

Also by the Author, (M. C. Ingraham)

“A Maximum Understanding of the Body of Christ”

“A Catholic Understanding of the Near Death Experience”

“The Gospel of Thomas, A Catholic Perspective”

Historical Setting

This novel is set in Israel about 30AD. Israel has not recovered from the disastrous conquests of Assyria and Babylon, which drove its people into exile, slavery, and religious compromise. There are more Jews living outside of Israel than in, and half the population in Israel is non-Jewish. The faith is in real danger of disappearing by dilution and compromise.

The leaders have wisely adopted a policy of including the several diverse groups within Judaism, rather than excommunicating them, which would further deplete the Jewish population within Israel. These groups include the Essenes, Zealots, Pharisees, and the rulers themselves, the Sadducees.

A program of religious conversion has been undertaken by which the faith is strengthened among current members, and lapsed members are called back; even pagans are appealed to. The village synagogues are centers of learning and community, and Greek and Aramaic translations of the scriptures are made available to the faithful. The temple has been rebuilt and made the tangible focus of the faith and of pilgrimage. The scribes and Pharisees set a strict standard for the faith in an effort to prevent its dilution.

The prophesied Messiah — priest, prophet, and king — is yearned for. He will drive the Romans from the land, restore Israel's borders, convert or exile the impious, bring justice and prosperity to the nation. The most hopeful vision of the Messiah's reign has him bringing God's instruction, and salvation to the entire world. Hope in the Messiah is a refuge for many, who toil to produce a harvest and provide for their families in the face of so many who strip them of their earnings. The mean lifespan in Israel is forty years.

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J E S U S



Roman Israel at the Time of Christ

Distance: Jerusalem to Qumran is 20 statute miles

FATHER

Jesus is a Foster Father

“*YOU* are his father Jesus, do something!” Hazorus said sternly.

Hazorus’ concern was directed at Zerah, foster son of Jesus. Zerah’s mother Abigail died in childbirth, and Zerah’s father followed his wife two years after that. Abigail was cousin to Jesus’ aunt Elizabeth; she had lived in Nazareth and grew up as a sister to Mary.

“There he is!” shouted Jesus as he ran to Zerah, who had become lost in the Passover crowd just outside the Beautiful gate of the temple.

Jesus was in a better position than most to take on a child. Two years ago, he entered into a partnership with his cousin Hazorus, and his return had been enough to pay off his two room house that he shared with Mary and Zerah. Hazorus made the thrice yearly pilgrimages to the temple to make thanks and sacrifice to the God of Israel, and now to give Jesus another note of credit and to update him on further business expansion.

Zerah was quickly recovered, even before the ten year old boy had considered himself lost. He suffered through a mild rebuke, and the family was little delayed in entering the temple. Zerah’s grandmother Mary took charge of him while Jesus and Hazorus wandered about, and then entered the court of the Israelites.

It was a custom in Jerusalem that no person be without lodging on Passover eve. Every son and daughter of Israel was to be protected behind door posts painted with lamb’s blood. Jesus and family, and Hazorus provided a lamb in exchange for shared lodging with acquaintances in Jerusalem.

The evening of their return to Nazareth found Jesus and Mary reclining on the roof of their home, the topic of conversation was the memory of Joseph. It was a frequent topic, and all their memories were good ones. Joseph was a rare man, his

life being the care of his family, cultivation of virtue, and piety toward God. He had often spoken of the brevity of life and of its real end — attainment to God.

The memories were like wine, and the conversation slowed as recollections were savored; silence fell and at an appropriate moment Jesus said, “Mother, was there ever the possibility of other children between you and Joseph?”

Mary replied, “No there was not. Joseph would not violate my marriage to the Holy Spirit, I remain a virgin...I think you know that.¹ I also think that you just like hearing of the courage and nobility of Joseph and that is why you ask these questions. I enjoy recalling his goodness also.”

A minute of comfortable silence followed before Mary announced, “I am going inside to check on Zerah.” This was Mary’s favorite part of the day. Zerah would be asleep, Mary would wrap her arms around him and stroke his hair, just enough to half awaken him so that she could coax him to sleep again with a song.

Jesus had been the recipient of such affection until he was declared a man at his ritual mitzvah, at age thirteen. After that time, the status of authority was supposed to reverse between Jesus and Mary, but it was never a matter of conflicting ideas or plans, so there was little transition. Sometimes his mother still stroked his hair while he sat, using a comb as an excuse.

Jesus would remain on the roof, he slept on the roof most of the year, he had even constructed a vent along the edge of the roof that allowed the rising heat from the cooling interior bricks to enter his blanket. After sunset he would pray, then sleep on the roof. He was up well before dawn for more prayer. His prayer was a combination of his favorite psalms and scripture verses, meditation on life, God, and his own particular calling.

¹ Mary gave birth only to Jesus. She espoused her husband the Holy Spirit at the annunciation and conception of Jesus. She remained faithful to her spouse the Holy Spirit and would not have relations with any other. In the Aramaic language “brother” and “sister” included those same generation males and females of one’s extended family, as there was no word for cousin. The extended family was the norm, and the language reflected this.

In this novel Jesus is depicted as a foster father — an all too common occurrence in a world in which people often died in their prime and left children needing care. Jesus is in fact a literal father. All of creation came to be through him, (Jn 1:3).

He used the remaining time before sunrise for centering prayer in which he cut off all distractions, thoughts and words other than God. The clutter of the day past, or the day approaching was disregarded simply by directing each faculty to the Father. His inner voice spoke, “God almighty...God, my God...God of hope...”, in an effortless rhythm with some simple variations. His inner voice preoccupied his hearing, allowing little notice of the few sounds of the night. His posture was one that likewise did not require effort of maintenance, he knelt sitting on his lower legs, his head tilted back, so as not to fall forward if a bit of sleep attempted to disturb his peace. Even his hands were directed to God in a gently raised position. The particular form these things took was secondary to their intention, union with the God of Israel.

Every fever was a death watch. Some fevers came on fast, others occurred at the end of life in those suffering ongoing illness or weakness. Joseph had died with a fever after a year of increasing weakness. Now Zerah was suddenly stricken. Jesus and Mary agreed to take night shifts in caring for Zerah, but neither could sleep. They had discussed calling for a physician, but they as often harmed as healed. Jesus preferred to trust in God.

Jesus’ son Zerah died in his sleep. Mary was collected, but Jesus buried his grief in burial activity. Jesus had constructed many coffins, but had none now. The coffin was used only to carry the body, and was not usually buried with the deceased, and Jesus would just have to do without.

Jesus went to the cemetery at dawn, just two hours after the death of Zerah. He searched for a burial location and brought along a spade. The cemetery was a public field and it was proper form to check in with the civil council first, but he did not want to wake anyone. Graves were marked with stones, by any one of several methods. The flat stones used as markers were occasionally taken, so it was best to sink a marker deep, and with the wider portion below ground making it more difficult to pull up.

Jesus knew the grave yard and what areas were reserved, and dug an interment hole for Zerah. He lined the hole with wildflowers and wild straw. A blanket served as a shroud for the boy. Sometimes a shroud could cover only

the upper body, such were the circumstances of the villagers in Galilee. Jesus stepped into the hole, and gently laid Zerah to rest. He filled in the grave, and stretched himself across the mound. Jesus prayed and cried tears of hope.

Later in the day, the thought occurred to Jesus — it seemed he was to be Messiah in Israel with no son as heir to the office. ²

-----ooOoo-----

² Chapters 1-3 depict Jesus as believing that he is called to the office of Messiah. Later chapters have Jesus growing in understanding, that the Messiah is his own person. He grows also in understanding the purpose of the Messiah, not as a king of the earth, but the means and the ends of salvation. This novel depicts Jesus as advancing in virtue and soul. Jesus was unconditionally divine, but also fully human. Every act of virtue and faith advanced his human soul in some way. A recurring idea that Jesus speaks of in this novel, is that the faithful will become Messiah themselves. This is the idea that the faithful constitute the literal body of Christ, on earth and in Heaven. Christ is now the entire body of Christ, and not Jesus alone (Acts 9:4). “Christ” is the Greek translation equivalent of the Hebrew “Messiah”.

Slave

Jesus is an Indentured Servant

“Job!”...“Job!”...someone was calling for Job. Why Job, what did it mean? Did it mean anything? Why did he hear the name Job everywhere he went?¹

At the marketplace in Nazareth, a woman called out “Job”, while a man shouted, “Yes, I am calling you.” The woman was closer and her words partially over spoke the others. Jesus heard, “Job, I am calling you.” Jesus was ready for anything; he scanned the area looking for anything unusual. Then he thought of Mary.

Jogging home, he tried not to recall of the story of Job and his family, and he wished that the name were more common, it might explain why he kept hearing it. But few people were named Job, and he had encountered this entire population in the last week.

Mary did not ask why Jesus was worried, or out of breath, or preoccupied most of the times he stepped through the door. That evening the reasons began to be revealed.

The rabbi was at the door step to tell of the death of Hazorus, uncle and partner of Jesus. He had died of fever in Tyre, five days ago. The funeral was over of course, but Jesus would have to make a trip to recover his share of the business, and to pay his respects.

¹ The Biblical character Job was scrupulous and perfect in his obedience to the decrees of God, and was richly rewarded. God sought to advance Job's soul by stripping him of his good fortune, leaving only faith in his life. He was to maintain faith and virtue, simply for the sake of God. Job had no part in sin, now he was tasked with eradicating even legitimate *self* interest. To persevere in faith, in such circumstances could only be done out of love of God. Job triumphed, was freed of self love and advanced in faith of God. In the Christian economy of salvation, once a person is free of self, he or she is then available for complete incorporation into Christ. One cannot become Christ if one remains self, even legitimate self. See also Appendix, “Spiritual Advancement”.

The court summons probably crossed paths with Jesus — it going to Nazareth, and he going to Tyre. When Jesus arrived at the home of Hazorus, his agent explained to Jesus that the business assets were being claimed by the creditors, that the personal assets of Hazorus and Jesus were both attached to the business and were likewise being claimed.

It was impossible to find a lawyer who would take the case without being paid in advance; they all thought that Jesus was at risk of a decision that would take all this assets, leaving the lawyer without payment. Jesus had to sell his horse to pay for a lawyer.

The decision regarding claims and assets was to be made in a Phoenician court, since it had been agreed to by Hazorus that Phoenician business law would be the basis for the contracts. The court required a new assessment of the assets, which were reported at half their reasonable value. Hazorus knew the system, and his Phoenician agents would have prevented this fraud, but all Jesus could get out of them now was delay and double talk. Jesus' lawyer was also doubly paid, he accepted a bribe to under represent his client.

Jesus wished he had never made the partnership. He could not help but go over it all again in his head, trying to see what had gone wrong, or what wrong he might be guilty of to bring on such a disaster. Hazorus was an honest and pious Jew, a shrewd businessman, and competent in every discipline. He could buy the cloak from a man's back and sell it back to him the same day, and had actually done this.

Hazorus had been a trader, he would purchase only what he could subdivide several times for resale — wheat, timber, cloth, papyrus. Several ships unloading a single commodity in Tyre or Caesarea might flood the market, this is when Hazorus would purchase.

Two years ago, Hazorus had acquired 223 large trees north of Tyre, included were many beautiful cedars of Lebanon. Because he was willing to purchase the trees alone without the land, he obtained a great value. Jesus was to form, lead, and work in the carpentry shop that harvested and used the lumber from these trees. He was to work for a reduced wage up front, but would share one fifth of the profits from the shop for the length of his work.

Hazorus was impressed with the plan Jesus had devised, the wood shop was to be on site where the trees were harvested. Jesus had advised that this provision be in the contract of purchase. It made work easier, and eliminated the expense of leasing a work shop. As each tree was harvested, it would be cut into a length determined by a number of factors: best use of the tree, demand for any given type of wood piece, tools, workers, and transportation available. The premium lengths, long and straight were sold for ships masts or extra long roofing joists. The elbows where branch joined to trunk were also valuable in ship construction. The smaller pieces would be sold by piece or auction to caravan owners who would take them to the cities, which had long ago depleted their surrounding forests. Mary and Zerah would remain in Nazareth, and Jesus would make his home in the shop.

Everything had gone right, the work was stimulating, hard and invigorating; he hired and directed assistants and daily labor from the marketplace. He went to the docks to take orders for ship repair parts, and quickly became a competent, efficient, and respected maritime engineer. The methods of sealing hull planks, inserting iron as reinforcements and joiners, and coating these to prevent rust were also acquired and in some instances improved upon by Jesus.

Jesus considered his busy work day an expansion of his prayer life; every task was executed in the image of God — justly, fully, competently — never with cynicism or negligence. Jesus had always worked in this manner, this was not a new method but it was new beauty, new holiness and one he created with his hands, mind, and spirit. Jesus had given a full third part of his profit to orphans and widows, much of it through the Essene house in Tyre, but now all these memories were as bitter as they were sweet.

Before the calamity, Jesus could see where it was all going. It confirmed his belief that he was called to be Messiah in Israel. Success would provide the means and influence for the peaceful assumption of rule from the Romans. Faith and virtue would restore Israel to moral and material glory and the Messiah king would lead the people into all of this. The foreigners would not be hunted or expelled, but would join the kingdom as sons and daughters of Israel. The God of Israel allowed Rome to rule in Israel because he meant to make them Jews!

His call to become Messiah was not his imagination, he had heard it from Joseph, from Mary, from Mary's sister. Others had said as much...in pieces, and it was up to him to assemble the pieces.

The court's decision was rendered in favor of the creditors, all assets of the business and its owners were to be forfeited to the creditors. Jesus lost everything in the Phoenician disaster — home, business, future prospects, social standing...joy, confidence, direction. It was all he could do to go to synagogue and make some dry prayer.

The days following the disaster were dismal, their home was seized by agent tax collectors with a hired Roman guard, and Mary went to stay with her sister Elizabeth in Bethany. Even after all of this a substantial amount of debt remained. The only thing he had to sell was his self...there were buyers.² It was a calculated risk, but if he did not do it, it might be done for him with an even worse outcome. Galley slaves were put there by the courts.

To be a slave in a galley was one of the very few situations that was worse than a debt sentence in prison. The debtor was not expected to pay off his burden of course — his family was. To motivate relatives to pay, the life of a debtor prisoner was made even worse than the other prisoners.

Depending on the prison and its overseer, a debtor prisoner might be given a year to live before death by serial beatings and starvation. It was simple math, the civil overseer was paying for food from his budget, and it was pointless to do so if no one would redeem the prisoner. The cell could be better used for a paying prisoner.

If an unredeemed debtor prisoner was strong enough he might be sold as a galley slave or a mineral miner. One was chained to an oar, living in undrinkable bilge salt water, mold, and rats; the other was chained to a mountain, which he hacked into rubble. Jews did not imprison those in debt, but Jesus was bound to Phoenician Law. Debt sentences were part of business law, and the Romans were usually content to let localities administer such law.

² It was no scandal in Israel for a person to sell his labor as an indentured servant. Jesus spends time as an indentured servant in this novel. In reality, many who are the body of Christ have actually lived as slaves or indentured servants, fathers and mothers.

He had to act quickly, not to save his house — that was gone. He had twenty-eight days to pay or face debtor's prison, a mineral mine, or a galley. Jesus actually had a preference in the matter. Tekoa the Idumean took on indentured servants. Tekoa was a relative of Herod, and Jesus could apply in Capernaum; any official or tax collector could act as agent, interview Jesus and report the results for decision.

The interview went well Jesus thought; he was summoned to Caesarea for final appraisal and hire. There Jesus accepted the offer of Tekoa to pay off his debt owed, in exchange for five years labor. He was put to work tending camels in Caesarea and working the local trade routes.

Jesus disliked the job at once. It was a matter of the corruption, anger, violence, irreverence, and lax morals of nearly everyone he worked with. He had seen it all, but always at a distance or from the insular position of a business agent for Hazorus. Now he was one of the slave workers himself. That evening he was banded as property.

Jesus had his choice of banding, or rather the circumstances of its application. If he was willing to pay he could purchase opium or wine to make it a bit less painful, but where does a slave get money? Some of the senior indentured servants had devised schemes, which earned them some money, and everyone had heard the stories of this or that slave becoming rich himself, purchasing freedom, citizenship or virtually anything else. But at this moment Jesus was penniless, and he had no desire to consume pain killing agents, some of which killed their patient.

A copper finger ring was selected and test fitted to ensure it was just undersized. The ring was then heated to expand and held by pliers over a bucket of water. The theory was that the greased finger of the slave would be quickly pushed through the ring and then directly into the water; the water would cool and shrink the band around the finger, while minimizing contact with the red hot copper. It worked, and Jesus was a banded man; the copper ring bore the mark of his owner. Under penalty of death, a property band could only be removed by the owner or his designee. Permanent slaves were not banded, but branded.

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