

# “Behold the man!”

## The titles and descriptions of Jesus of Nazareth

### 1. Introduction

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**I**T WAS PILATE who invited his assembled audience to “Behold the man!” (Jno. 19:5). This he did in a vain effort to make them consider who Jesus was and what they had done to him. Pilate had probably hoped that the unruly mob would reconsider its demand to continue their aggression against Jesus by way of crucifixion. Not wanting to believe he was the Son of God, they were unyielding in their madness, crying, “Crucify him, crucify him” (v. 6). This series of articles is offered in the hope that readers, having ‘beheld the man’, will be strengthened in their belief that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and will follow him with greater commitment.

There are a number of books written on the subject that are to be found in religious bookshops. Sadly, they are all flawed to a greater or lesser extent with the heresy of the Trinity, but are still of some value. Take your minds back to when it was ‘known’ that the earth was flat. Frequently, ships were steered from England to Africa and beyond using maps. Despite a fundamental flaw in the understanding of the earth, their maps were still of use.

I have found it so with the works of various authors on this subject. Like any other work by a writer from the churches around us, they should be treated with caution. Readers will notice that I write in very strong terms against the Trinity. This is for two reasons. Firstly, it confuses the position of God and Jesus, and secondly, it causes us to draw back from considering the majesty of Jesus Christ for fear of being thought of as Trinitarian.

It has been a difficult task to sort out what is a title from what is merely a description. If the context and meaning of the passage seemed to indicate a title then it has been included as such. A consideration of descriptions will appear later on in the series.

#### **Titles of Jesus**

Some may be disturbed by repeated references to Jesus without an appended title. I am well aware

that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ, and that he deserves our respect and honour. I am also aware that after his resurrection and glorification he is hardly (if ever) called Jesus without a title. However, there are good reasons for not following this practice here. This series of articles endeavours to consider all his titles and thereby enable us to honour him with greater understanding. In our daily lives we mostly refer to Jesus as either Lord or Christ, or a combination. Both of these forms of address, whilst right and proper (and even desirable), are treated in this series separately, as titles. I trust that the reader will appreciate that it may be clearer to call him by his name, Jesus, for the purpose of considering his titles.

For this reason I will call him ‘Jesus’ or ‘Jesus of Nazareth’ in many places, particularly in the earlier articles. It is hoped that by the end of the series it will be evident that the purpose of writing is to elevate the Son of God in our minds in order to give him the praise he so richly deserves, and not to bring him down to our level. There are those who readily use the name ‘Jesus’ without a title. Frequently such people are reticent to use the name ‘Yahweh’ without a title, or at all, for fear of disrespect. On the other hand, many of those who use the name ‘Yahweh’ frequently without a title are reluctant to call God’s Son ‘Jesus’ without a title for fear of disrespect. The balance seems to afford the best approach. In a spirit of understanding and honour it is not inappropriate to use the names ‘Yahweh’ and ‘Jesus’ when speaking of God and His Son. We must endeavour to grow close to God and his Son so that we know them intimately, love and honour them.

In John 17:3 we read, “this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent”. To understand the titles of Jesus is surely, then, of paramount importance. Frequently we allow our mind to translate the titles into a word, probably ‘Christ’ or ‘Lord’. We may even do this subconsciously. The subject of all the titles is very easily ascertained.

The focus that the Spirit wants us to have is not who is being spoken of. Rather we are directed to consider why is he spoken of in these ways. If we subconsciously replace all the titles of Jesus with 'Christ', for example, we miss the whole point of the record. The reader will discover in reading these articles that the titles of Jesus describe who he was and what his character was like, and are used carefully to suit the character of each particular aspect of his mission.

### **Names and their meanings**

It is interesting to compare the meanings of the names of Old Testament people with the person, character and work of Jesus. We cannot be sure to what extent Jesus was in the mind of those who named them. When we examine a list of characters' names together with their meanings, it is evident that hundreds of names may in some way, if not directly, have reference to Jesus. Whether much ought to be made of this I am unsure. Parents then were in the habit of giving names with an attached meaning. This is quite different from the Western norm, where we tend to give names that sound agreeable and may not have much idea of what they mean.

It was usual in Biblical times to give names that had reference to God, strength and virtues of character. We can see easily how such names would be generally applicable to Jesus. Perhaps in the families of Israel the features of the coming Messiah as they understood them were at times woven into the names that were given to their children. The people who stand out in Scripture as types of Jesus are perhaps the ones we might focus on, if any. It is also true that some people who had names with lovely meanings were themselves unlovely.

I was at one time seized with pursuing the meanings of names of Biblical characters in search of references to our Lord. Whilst such an exercise demonstrates the harmony of the record of Scripture in even the least detail, I at length discontinued it because it would have taken far more time to do than the value of the exercise would justify.

### **The name 'Jesus of Nazareth'**

Before his birth 2,000 years ago Jesus was named by the angel Gabriel, who visited his mother Mary before he was conceived, and also by the angel (probably Gabriel as well) who visited Joseph when he was betrothed to Mary, after Jesus was conceived. Jesus is the Greek form of a Hebrew

name and corresponds to Joshua (or Yahoshua). The meaning of his name was the reason for its being given, foretelling his life and work. The angel who visited Joseph made it plain when in a dream he said, "thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21). 'Yah shall save' or 'Yah is salvation' is the meaning of the name. We are thereby given to understand that the principal being behind the birth and mission of Jesus is none other than the Creator of heaven and earth, the Almighty God Himself. God Himself named Jesus and chose to put His own name (Yah) as part of his. We must therefore come to the inevitable conclusion that God is vitally concerned with all that has to do with this man Jesus of Nazareth.

It is interesting to observe that the English-speaking Christian world in the main has attached particular importance to the name 'Jesus' rather than 'Joshua'. We frequently find children called Joshua, and very rarely called Jesus. If we wish to be precise, the name of the Son of God was Joshua (or Yahoshua) and not Jesus, as he was a Jew and not a Greek.

It will become obvious as the New Testament is read that there are several people with the name Jesus. It is important now, as it was then, to make a distinction between them. There are some passages in Scripture that are confusing at first, such as Acts 7:45 and Hebrews 4:8, which both use the name 'Jesus' when the person spoken of is Joshua the son of Nun of Old Testament fame.

There are several ways that people were identified in ancient Israel. Firstly, one might be surnamed with the name of one's father, for example Simon Bar-Jonah or Simon Son of Jonah. Secondly, an occupation or any particular distinguishing feature might be adopted as a surname, for example, Simon the Leper or Simon the Tanner. Thirdly, the location from which one came was added as a suffix to a name, for example, Simon of Cyrene. In this way it was possible, in much the same way as we do today, to sort out different people bearing the same first name.

The people about Jesus properly recognised neither who his father was nor what his chief employment was to be. Even Mary and Joseph had the same difficulty. In the record of the journey to Jerusalem for the Passover in Luke 2 it is recorded that they confused both his parentage and his work, so neither of the first options was suitable to designate Jesus. It was an appropriate choice for Jesus to have been called Jesus

of Nazareth, as we will see when we consider the title 'Nazarene'. Nazareth was the city from which Joseph and Mary came. It was also where Jesus spent most of the first thirty years of his life.

Jesus of Nazareth is his name, yet the names, or more properly titles, he is given in Scripture describe him in much greater detail than this. The various titles, either in conjunction with or separate from the name Jesus, portray the most wonderful man that has ever lived. It will be seen that in most cases the whole name 'Jesus of Nazareth' is not used, either because it is clear from the context which Jesus is the subject of the record, or because, in combination with titles like Christ and Lord, there can be no doubt.

The name of Jesus is especially important because it was given before he was born. In many cultures names have special relevance to the people who bear them and are usually given in that way after they are born. The name Jesus was given prior to his birth and, if we would take types from the Old Testament, many years prior to his birth. Jesus, therefore, is marked out in God's purpose as special because he was born to be our saviour. He did not take upon himself the role of saviour later in life.

### **The scope of the study**

I am not aware of any other work within the Christadelphian Brotherhood that deals at such length with the titles and descriptions of Jesus as does this study. The principal motivation for writing it has been to present before brethren and sisters the beauty and wonder of our Lord Jesus Christ as he is described in the various scriptures. I have tried to present an overview of the essential message of each title and description rather than a detailed exposition. Much of the material has not had its origin with my thoughts. I have read whatever I could find and used many writers' conclusions to assist with my own. What is new is the putting together of the titles in a holistic fashion, woven into a tapestry of instruction and edification. Readers should use other reference material to expand on the material presented. *Eureka*, for example, gives particularly good (and lengthy) explanations of all the titles found in Revelation, as well as some others.

I hope I have included as many titles and descriptions as possible. It would be nice to say that they are all included, but I am not so naïve as to believe that there is none that has been missed. No

attempt has been made to exhaust all the avenues of thought for any of the titles. To the contrary, it would be such a large undertaking that it would be beyond my ability. There is much that is left undone. Why, for example, are some titles used a great deal in one place or by one writer, and not in another? What I trust has been presented is a short section on every title, that they may be used as a springboard for further study.

The divisions into which I have placed the titles are of my own making, though not entirely in an arbitrary way. The placement of each title into one or other of the categories has not been without much thought. Chiefly, I have sought the direction of the meaning and context of the title before deciding where it best went. Without such a process the results of the comparisons between Yahweh and Jesus would have far less significance. In dividing the titles up in this way I am aware that there are several other ways in which we may categorise them in order to highlight particular details. I decided at length that the categories used in this series made the most sense and provided the best basis for instruction.

This work is not intended to increase our knowledge of our Lord in an academic sense. If by reading this study there is not a greater love and honour generated in our hearts for the Anointed Son of God, who died that we might live, then we will do as well to read the writings of Plato or Aristotle. Considering the person, character and work of Jesus must also bring about moral improvement. If we are not by our study compelled to be more like Christ, our intellectual gymnastics will only tend towards greater condemnation. We may believe that we know him; we may even call him Lord; but if he does not see himself in us then we will be aliens, to be turned away with the words, "I never knew you" (Mt. 7:23). It is imperative that our understanding is matched by love, honour and devotion.

The injunction given by the Apostle Paul is, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2:19). It is to be hoped that, as these words are read and the reader thus is caused to "Behold the man", the vision of the glory and beauty of Jesus Christ will encourage him to aspire to the same glory and beauty in mortality now, that we may share it forever with him in the future.

[\(To be continued\)](#)