

# Did Jesus Exist?

By Tom Crawford

**H**E WAS BORN of a virgin in a cowshed on 25th December before three shepherds and visited by three wise men bringing frankincense and myrrh. He was God made flesh, the saviour and Son of God. He was credited with innumerable miracles, including the calming of the sea. He had 12 disciples. He offered his followers the chance to be 'born again'. He miraculously turned water into wine at a marriage ceremony. He rode triumphantly into town on a donkey while people waved palm leaves to honour him. He died at Easter time as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. On the third day he rose from the dead and ascended to heaven in glory. His followers awaited his return, as judge, during the last days. His death and resurrection were celebrated by a ritual meal of bread and wine which symbolised his body and blood.

You would be forgiven for thinking I have just been speaking about Jesus Christ, but no, the above refers to the pagan gods of Osiris-Dionysus and Mithras, who were worshipped 300 years before Jesus. Amazingly, the similarities between these pagan gods and Jesus Christ are generally unknown today. In the first few centuries C.E they were obvious to pagans and Christians alike. The pagan philosopher Celsus criticised Christians for trying to pass off the Jesus story as a new revelation when it was actually an inferior imitation of pagan myths. The early Christians were painfully aware of such criticism. How could pagan myths which predated Christianity by hundreds of years have so much in common with the biography of the one and only saviour, Jesus? Desperate to come up with an explanation, the early church fathers resorted to one of the most absurd theories ever advanced. They declared that the Devil had plagiarised Christianity by anticipation in order to lead people astray. In other words, the Devil had copied the stories of Jesus' life IN AD-



VANCE of it happening and so created the myths of the pagan gods.

Few Christians today know that a pagan temple once stood on the site where the Vatican now stands. Early Christians found the sacred ceremonies practised there so disturbing that they tried to erase all evidence of them. One of these ceremonies celebrated a symbolic meal of bread and wine in memory of their saviour, Mithras, who like Jesus had declared: "He who will not eat of my body and drink of my blood, so that he will be made one with me and I with him, the same shall not know salvation". There are many more examples of the similarities between the early pagan Gods and Jesus, including speeches and parables. So did a historical Jesus really exist?

Christians believe the main body of evidence for a historical Jesus comes from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, but these were written at least 40 years after the supposed events. We do not know who wrote them and none of the authors makes

any claim to have even met an earthly Jesus. Add to this the fact that none of the original manuscripts exists - we only have copies of copies.

The Gospels describe narrative stories, written almost virtually in the third person. The stories themselves cannot serve as examples of eyewitness accounts since they came as products of the unknown authors, and not from the characters themselves. People who wish to portray themselves as eyewitnesses will write in the first person, not the third.

Many of the passages attributed to Jesus could only have come from the inventions of their authors. For example, many of the statements of Jesus claim to have come from him when he was alone. If so, who heard him? It becomes even more absurd when the authors report what Jesus THOUGHT. To whom did he confide his thoughts? In any case, the Gospels can only serve at best as hearsay and at worst as fictional, mythological or even falsified stories.

If we do not believe the Gospel writers when they say Jesus was the Son of God or that he was born of a virgin, why should we believe them when they claim that a real person called Jesus existed? What are we left with? It would appear to be very little!

The only other main source of information about Jesus comes from the apostle Paul, but his letters do not portray Jesus in a historical setting and he makes no mention of Jesus' life on earth. In fact, nowhere do any of the New Testament epistle writers describe a human Jesus. Neither do they mention a Jesus from Nazareth and none of them quote him. Is it just possible that Paul's were about a mythical Messiah similar to ➤