

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #63:

THE REAL JESUS

By John Temples

“When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’ So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets’” (Matthew 16:13-14).

Who was the Man Jesus? There was a lot of confusion in Jesus’s day as to who He really was. He certainly didn’t fit the mold of the average Jewish rabbi. For one thing, He did miracles. And for another thing, He spoke with authority. People said they never heard anyone speak like He did. But there were nagging doubts about His birth circumstances, His upbringing, and His refusal to join the “in crowd.”

Even some of His own disciples weren’t exactly sure about Him. Once when Jesus and His disciples were in a boat, a great storm came up. Jesus instantly calmed the roaring sea with a word. His disciples had been afraid of the storm; now, they were afraid of Him. Mark 4:41 says, “And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, ‘Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!’”

“Who can this be?” they said. We have the same problem today, only worse. People still don’t know what to make of Jesus. Many folks get their idea of who Jesus was from watching TV documentaries, which contain many errors regarding His identity, particularly His physical appearance.

An increasingly common view regarding Christ is that he was merely a good man, perhaps a wise philosopher, but not the Son of God. Others see Him as some kind of Che Guevara rebel figure. A few years ago, there was an article in my local paper about an “Easter” sunrise service for bikers. Here is part of that article: “It was only a few moments until dawn when a group of about 50 motorcyclists pulled into Gilchrist Park early Sunday.... They came for one purpose: to pay tribute to someone they could relate to. He was like many of them--**a renegade** who was

hated by the government and persecuted by the church. The bikers came to praise **the ultimate rebel, Jesus Christ....**” That article made my blood boil.

Here are some other modern, worldly, average-person-on-the-street views of Jesus:

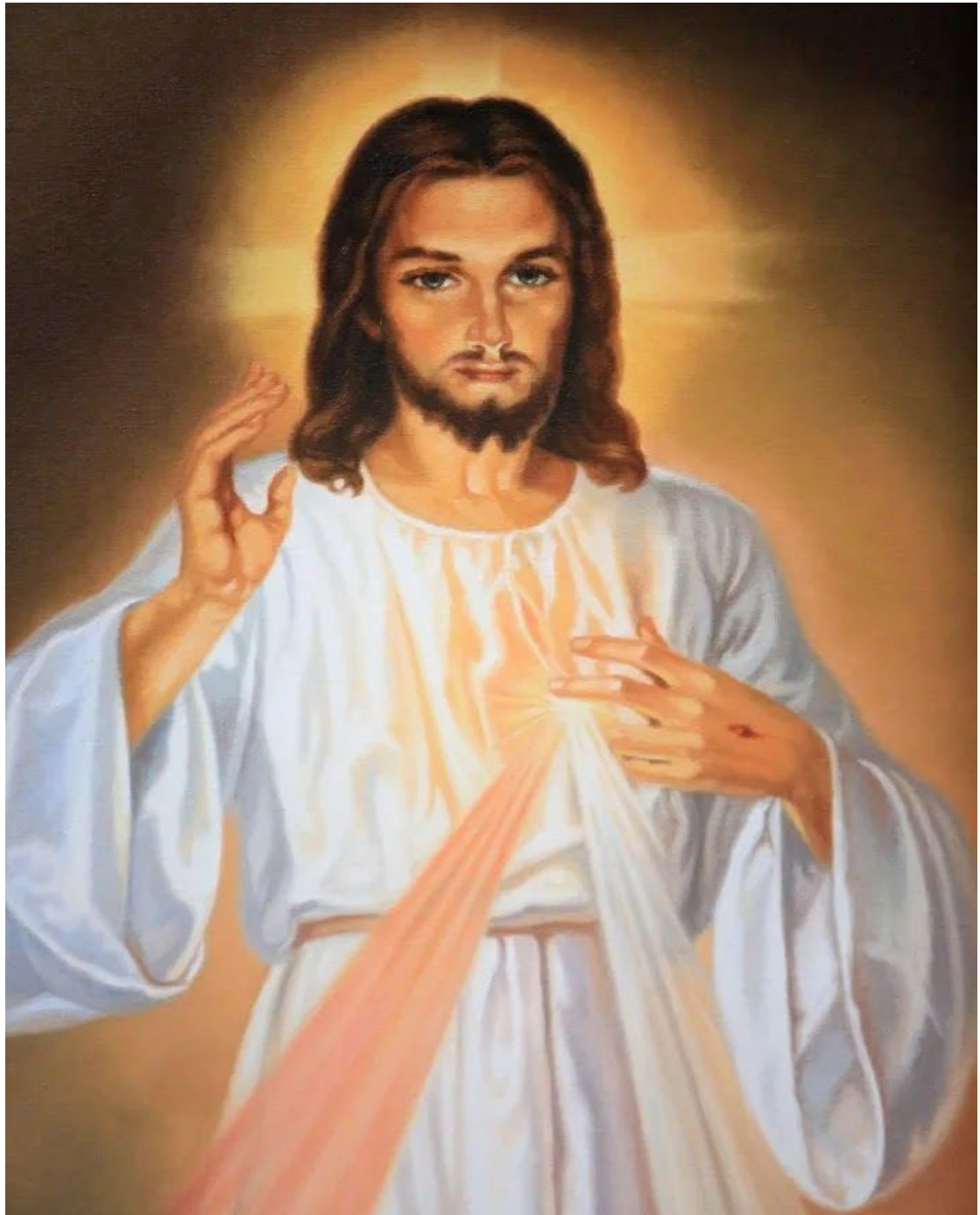
- A Middle Eastern guru
- A cultic leader of some mystical Jewish sect
- A really good magician
- Just another itinerant preacher with unusual insight
- A political and religious reformer
- A social crusader
- A long-haired hippie
- A deluded Jew with a Messiah complex
- And most disgusting of all, some now dare call Jesus a homosexual.

What about modern religious views of Jesus? They are not much better. We've all seen this artist's picture of the Lord, portraying Him as delicate, pale, and effeminate. He is seen kneeling in a long robe, with His hands (featuring long, slender, tapering fingers) neatly folded on a rock. He has a frizzy, wispy beard and a sad look on His face.

On the next page is an even worse drawing. Talk about



being effeminate! Is it any wonder we don't hear our children say, upon seeing pictures like these, "I want to grow up to be just like Jesus"?



The world, and even many Christians, badly need to be challenged to read the Bible--the only authentic source of information about Him--and to discover **the real Jesus**.

WHAT ABOUT HIS PHYSICAL APPEARANCE?

The vast majority of artists' renditions of the physical appearance of Jesus are nowhere near what He really looked like. Consider some facts gleaned from Scripture:

Jesus was a Jew--not Caucasian, not African, not Oriental. He was a descendant of Abraham. If you go over to Israel today and look at some thirty-ish Jewish men who have lived in the desert for a long time, you will get a pretty good idea of what Jesus looked like. He certainly didn't look like the picture above!

Jesus was a masculine, robust, strong, active individual. He was a carpenter until He was 30 years old (Mark 6:3). He walked almost everywhere He went. He had great strength--He was able to go without food for 40 days. He had great manly courage--He drove animals and moneychangers out of the temple with a whip. And He was able to endure the Roman scourging and the cross (many men did not last even through the scourging).

Jesus was strong, yet He did not flaunt His manhood. He showed great tenderness and respect to women. Little children loved to be with Him and felt comfortable around Him.

So physically, Jesus looked just like a normal Jewish man. There was nothing unusual or bizarre about His appearance. He was so normal-looking that He was able to disappear into a crowd to escape His enemies (John 5:13, 8:59). He was so normal-looking that Judas had to identify Him to the Roman soldiers with a kiss in the garden. Judas couldn't say, "Just look for the guy that glows in the dark"!

BUT WHAT ABOUT ISAIAH 53:2?

Isaiah 53:2 says, “For He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.” This is almost certainly NOT speaking of the Lord’s physical appearance. We’ve already noted that Jesus looked like any normal Jewish man. If He was ugly, or deformed in some way, why was He so popular at weddings and social gatherings? Why did children want to be with Him? His enemies accused Him of many things, but never of being ugly or repulsive in appearance. Burton Coffman says, “What is meant is that none of the trappings of wealth, office, social status, or any other such things which are so honored among men, belonged to Jesus.”

Now, let’s look at what in my view is the most inaccurate aspect of the traditional pictures of Jesus: His hair length.

DID JESUS HAVE LONG HAIR?

In almost every picture you have ever seen, Christ has long, flowing hair. Is this accurate? I can remember the 1960s when the hippie movement began. One of the marks of a 60s hippie was long hair. Almost invariably, when one of them was asked why he let his hair grow so long, the reply was “it’s OK, because Jesus had long hair.” No, He didn’t!

Here are three reasons why we can know that our Lord did not have long hair:

First: the prevailing hair style for men in Jesus’s time was short, not long. Here are two quotes from authoritative Internet sources:

- “Statues of men from this time period generally reveal men with short hair. While nearly all statues from this period were Greco-Roman, the consistent portrayal of short-haired men affirms this was a more likely scenario for Jewish men as well during this time period.”
(<https://www.compellingtruth.org/Jesus-long-hair.html>)
- “We do know what a typical Jewish man of that time might have looked like....There are plenty of Jews represented in Egyptian or Roman

archaeological finds such as the frieze on Rome's Arch of Titus depicting Jewish captives being led away from a defeated Jerusalem in 70 AD. Jewish men it seemed all had short hair.”

(<https://askjohnmackay.com/hair-did-jesus-have-long-hair/>)

It's interesting to study artists' drawings of Jesus and His disciples. Here is one:



Notice that Jesus is the only man in the picture with long hair! This agrees with the consensus of scholars that the prevailing hair style for men in Jesus's day was short. Here's another:



And another:



Jesus is the only male in the picture with long hair!

Second: We can know that Jesus did not have long hair because He was not a Nazirite. It may surprise you to learn that the only Jewish men who wore their hair long in Bible times were those who were under a Nazirite vow. A Nazirite was a Jew who was under a vow of dedication to God (see Numbers 6:1-21, especially verse 5). One of the requirements of the Nazirite vow was that the person was not to cut his hair until the time of the vow was fulfilled. Samson was a Nazirite, and we all know about his hair length. John the Baptist was also a Nazirite. But Jesus was not.

“Oh,” people will say, “but the Bible says Jesus was a Nazirite.” No, it doesn’t. He was a Nazarene, meaning a citizen of Nazareth. We also know Jesus was not a Nazirite because He did things that were specifically forbidden to a Nazirite: (1) He touched a dead body (Matthew 9:25); and (2) He drank wine (Matthew 11:19).

So if you saw a Jewish man with long hair walking down the street, you would know he was under a Nazirite vow. What does that tell us about the hair length of all other Jewish men in Jesus’s day? It must have been short; otherwise, there would have been no meaning to the Biblical requirement for a Nazirite to remain unshorn.

And besides all that, note that the long hair of a Nazirite was a sign of humiliation and submission to God--it was not a sign of rebellion!

Third--and the plainest reason we know that Jesus did not have long hair--is that His own word says it is a shame and a disgrace. The New Testament condemns long hair on a man in 1 Corinthians 11:14--“Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?” The NIV and ESV read, “it is a disgrace to him.” The KJV says, “it is a shame to him.” The NLT paraphrase reads, “Isn't it obvious that it's disgraceful for a man to have long hair?”

Jesus would not have embarrassed Paul by violating His own law as dictated to Paul.

WHAT ABOUT THE CHARACTER AND PERSONALITY OF JESUS?

We've spent most of the time in this article discussing the physical appearance of the Lord, and that is important. But it's also vital to note other misconceptions people have about Jesus. Here are some:

The real Jesus had a sense of humor. He called two of His disciples "sons of thunder." He spoke of straining camels through needle eyes and swallowing camels. When His disciples got delusions of grandeur about sitting on thrones, He sent two of them to fetch a donkey. Jesus was a popular guest at weddings and suppers. Yes, He had a sense of humor.

The real Jesus was no hippie or rebel. He obeyed the authorities and paid His taxes. He taught and demonstrated real love--not cheap, imitation, physical love. He was the perfect specimen of manhood, the best of the kind. He was God in human flesh. He gave the ultimate sacrifice for us. If people want justification for long hair or rebellion, they are going to have to look elsewhere.

So, take your Bible and get to know the real Jesus. And teach your children and grandchildren the same. Maybe then we WILL hear some boy or girl say, "I want to grow up to be just like Jesus." --John Temples