Introduction

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Two thousand years have come and gone, but still his remains the unfinished story that refuses to go away. Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew from rural first-century Galilee, is without doubt the most famous and most influential human being who ever walked the face of the earth. His influence may at present be declining in a few countries of western Europe and parts of North America, as has from time to time transpired elsewhere. But the global fact is that the adherents of Jesus are more widespread and more numerous, and make up a greater part of the world's population, than at any time in history. Two billion people identify themselves as Christians; well over a billion Muslims revere Jesus as a prophet of God (Barrett and Johnson 2001). Unnumbered others know and respect his memory as a wise and holy man.

The followers of Jesus live in every country of the globe. They read and speak of him in a thousand tongues. For them, the world's creation and destiny hold together in him, the wholly human and visible icon of the wholly transcendent and invisible God. He animates their cultures, creeds and aspirations.

For many non-believers, too, indeed to the majority of the earth's population, Jesus is a household name, whose 'brand recognition' still far outstrips that of McDonald's, Microsoft or MTV. To be sure, that fact is today as complex as a shattered prism, refracting centuries of hopes and fears, ardour and contempt. The mention of Jesus brings to mind acts both of heroic charity and of unspeakable evil – any of which have from time to time been committed either in his name or in spite of it. Billions view the name and even the cultural symbols of Jesus as signifying either great benefits or else great torment inflicted on their collective and perhaps their personal history. Both for good and for ill, Jesus remains a household name around the world.

How ironic, then, that during his lifetime Jesus was neither exceptionally famous nor particularly influential on the lives and events in the society in which he lived. We know remarkably little about his life, and what little we think we do know is almost inevitably coated by popular loves and

hates, by interpreters' wishful thinking and unbridled speculation, and of course by two thousand years of accumulated tradition.

This remarkable 'footprint' of Jesus in history, at once deeply troubling and richly life-giving, has strangely contradictory implications for an encounter with him today. On the one hand, it means that a true and adequate understanding of the man remains a vital task, even as his third millennium has dawned. And yet, the very weight of his aftermath infinitely complicates our ability to perceive and justify quite what such a 'true and adequate understanding' might be.

For all that we have learned from three centuries of so-called 'critical' (but almost exclusively western) scholarship, the simultaneous late modern globalisation and retribalisation of human culture has at last thrown us back on one basic insight: knowledge is always relative to the knower, not just to the object known. For the case in point, this means that we can never adequately know the history of Jesus unless we know our own history – and, just as significantly, vice versa. Epistemologically, Jesus and his effects in our world are inextricably intertwined: the man of Nazareth cannot be understood in isolation from the footprint he has left on our collective and individual understanding, feeling and knowing.

At least in the western world, it remains true that we can understand neither Christian faith nor much of the world around us if we do not come to terms with Jesus of Nazareth and the two millennia of engagement with his heritage. On the pages of first-century history books he was of course a mere blip, whom the journalists and historians of his day ignored or regarded as of little consequence. And yet, there is an obvious and equally 'historical' sense in which he is clearly *not* just 'a man like any other man'.

The shape of this book is significantly influenced by considerations such as these. Issues of history, literature, theology and the dynamic of a lived religious reality are of integral importance to our subject. The contributors are all accomplished scholars in their respective fields, yet all share a keen awareness of the multidisciplinary nature of any valid study of Jesus. Although committed to the highest standards of technical competence, the authors were encouraged to 'think big', to build bridges, and to view things 'in colour'.

The argument of the book unfolds in two parts, which roughly correspond to the twin tasks of the historical description of Jesus and of critical and theological reflection on him. Obviously the two tasks cannot be quite so neatly separated – as was, for example, the assumption behind the once fashionable but classically misconceived distinction between a Jesus 'of history' and the divine Christ of faith. Indeed, Part I demonstrates the extent to

which any serious historical engagement with Jesus must face the insistent challenges of truth, hope and mercy that are inescapably raised by his life and teaching – and indeed by his abiding imprint in the life of the world. Part II in turn appropriates for theology the converse point about particularity, painfully reinforced by the century now past. The meaning of Jesus in the global story of Christian worship, life and study remains incomprehensible apart from the apostolic witness to that migrant Jew from Nazareth who walked the troubled Palestinian hills two thousand years ago, who wept for Jerusalem, and who bound his fate to that city and the people of God. The recovery of this fact is perhaps the most important achievement of the recent flurry of historical Jesus scholarship (cf. Meier 1999:486).

Part I, then, begins with 'the Jesus of history'. In a textbook like this, it is neither possible nor desirable to account at every turn for the historical-critical details of scholarly method and argument. The authors approach their task in the light of extensive and measured critical deliberation, some offering more and some less referenced documentation. And, needless to say, the resulting picture shows disagreements in emphasis and even in substance between the writers, e.g. on the importance of the sayings source known as Q, on questions of chronology, or on the place of baptism in the ministry of Jesus. The resulting narrative, however, is in every case designed as a critical synthesis of the historical evidence for Jesus, alert to the substance and implications of his message.

Craig A. Evans starts by sketching the background of Jesus' cultural and religious setting, within which a prima facie reading of his words and deeds makes historical sense. Highlights of his chapter 1 include a discussion of the social and religious setting of Galilee as well as the specific question of the influence of Scripture and its interpretation.

The next three chapters deal with different aspects of the practice and the teaching of Jesus. Peter Tomson begins with the difficult question of *what sort of Jew* Jesus was (chapter 2). Both his own fate and the history of the church acutely raise the question of how Jesus of Nazareth should be understood in relation to the Judaism of his time – and perhaps of ours. Christian interpretation has too frequently assumed that his words and actions intended a subversion, supersession or replacement of Judaism, its Temple and its law. Tracing key themes of the gospel tradition, Tomson shows that Jesus' own religious praxis and message make contextual sense only within, rather than over against, the diverse and complex reality of first-century Palestinian Judaism.

Marianne Meye Thompson then sharpens our focus more specifically on the question of Jesus' view of God (chapter 3). What, if anything, might

we be able to say about the 'religion' of Jesus, and specifically his encounter of God as Father? Thompson shows that this question (which in a rather different form once occupied nineteenth-century liberals) goes to the very heart of Jesus' concerns. It also, significantly, turns out to constitute a vital bridge over the supposed chasm between 'the faith of Jesus' and 'faith in Jesus'.

Adopting a broader sweep, Graham Stanton's chapter 4 explores more fully the distinctive themes and practices that characterised Jesus' ministry: his message of the kingdom of God in its Jewish context, his parables and miracles, his highly symbolic and controversial practice of life-changing table fellowship. What was their role in highlighting, and perhaps shaping, Jesus' own identity and ministry? Stanton shows how all these different lines of inquiry about Jesus' 'messianic' words and deeds converge on the central issue of Jesus' identity, as focused by John the Baptist's question from prison (Matt 11.3 par. Luke 7.19): 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?'

Part I then turns its attention from the ministry of Jesus to his personal fate. The stage is set by Bruce Chilton's fast-paced narration of the relational dynamics that characterised Jesus' dealings with both friends and enemies (chapter 5). The leading cast of characters here ranges from John the Baptist's towering formative influence, via different circles of disciples, to Jesus' final confrontation with Caiaphas over his corruption of the purity of God's Temple – and with Pontius Pilate, whose slavery to political ambition made him the High Priest's willing executioner.

Joel B. Green takes this line of questioning to its logical conclusion by examining the rushed trial and Roman execution of Jesus (chapter 6). Different perspectives are possible: that of an ancient historian, of the Roman provincial administration, of the Sadducean religious leadership in Jerusalem, and so on. For the gospel writers, shaped as they are by a Jewish understanding of Scripture as prophecy, the last week of Jesus' life was so replete with biblical typology that the only way of telling the story was to show the historical and theological threads indistinguishably interwoven in the very fabric of the subject matter.

The Editor's own chapter 7 on the resurrection concludes Part I, and serves to highlight the inescapable importance of the issues raised in Part II. It stresses the importance of the historical dimension in the question of Jesus' resurrection. For all the excited confusion of the gospel narratives, whatever happened on that first Easter Sunday is an integral part of any rigorously historical account of Jesus. Beyond that, however, it seems strangely apropos, and hardly accidental, that the apostolic witness to the resurrection became

the decisive reason why we have any knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth at all. The gospel writers unanimously claim that the expectation of suffering and divine vindication was part of the biblical story of the Christ from start to finish – and there is reason to think that Jesus of Nazareth thought so too. The consensus of early Christian testimony that 'God raised Jesus from the dead' turns out to be both deeply rooted in Jewish eschatological hope and at the same time a dramatic reappropriation of that heavenly hope for the here and now.

The second and somewhat longer part of the book goes on to explore some of the implications and 'begged questions' of Part I. Historical study of Jesus of Nazareth evokes a marked sense of his abiding 'footprint' in history – what Leander Keck (2000) perceptively terms 'history in perfect tense'. For any integrated critical appreciation, therefore, the past and the presence of Jesus are necessarily interdependent: each can only be fully understood and assessed in light of the other. This has implications in terms of method, of hermeneutics, and of historical and theological appropriation.

Two studies of method lead the way. The first, by Christopher Tuckett, offers a state-of-the-art survey of critical methods for the study of Jesus (chapter 8). This chapter shows the difficulties and pitfalls facing the scholarly inquiry about the historical Jesus. We are given an expert's critical assessment of the canonical gospels and the relations between them (the so-called 'Synoptic Problem'), as well as of non-traditional sources like Q and the *Gospel of Thomas*, which have been widely promoted in some recent scholarship. Tuckett then proceeds to plot a course through the strengths and weaknesses of various standard scholarly 'criteria' used to assess the historical authenticity of sayings and narratives about Jesus, highlighting especially the need to safeguard the historical and contextual 'plausibility' of the story of Jesus within first-century Jewish Galilee and Jerusalem.

While Christopher Tuckett surveys methods and criteria for the study of Jesus, James Carleton Paget offers a historical perspective on such study in chapter 9. He begins with a brief survey of ancient, medieval and early modern approaches, but then concentrates especially on developments since the Enlightenment, which he attempts to set within the broader intellectual history of their day. Ever since Albert Schweitzer's famous survey of nineteenth-century 'lives' of Jesus, the different histories of Jesus research have themselves been the subject of considerable attention; and Carleton Paget poses several critical questions to the currently dominant paradigm of 'three quests'. He concludes with some (soberingly modest) suggestions about lasting results and future desiderata of the study of the historical Jesus.

The preceding chapters necessarily raise the vexing problem of the one and the many: what, then, is the relationship between the variously reconstructed Jesuses of the historians and the 'real' Jesus, the one who stands behind all the different images and who presumably undergirds Christian faith? Three chapters address this problem from a theological point of view. First, in chapter 10 Francis Watson explores some probing questions about the seemingly adversarial relationship of Christian theology and critical historical scholarship, offering important challenges to both modes of inquiry along the way. Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi in Mark 8 serves as an important exegetical touchstone in this respect, as it highlights the apostolic confession of Jesus vis-à-vis other possible images. Watson suggests that it is only the critical dialogue with historical scholarship that can clarify the meaning of the church's identification of the 'real' Jesus with his depiction in the fourfold gospel of Scripture.

The same plurality of witnesses, of course, faced the early church too. Stephen C. Barton addresses the fourfold gospel as the particular form in which the New Testament canon explicitly affirmed and yet limited the scope of that plurality (chapter 11). Drawing on the second-century exposition of Irenaeus of Lyons, Barton shows how the early church based its affirmation of the unity of the one gospel in the four gospels not on its ability to harmonise differences, but on the universal norm of the Rule of Faith, the substance of apostolic faith and practice.

One of the remarkable, and in Christian practice too frequently neglected, aspects of the New Testament's witness to Jesus is that it exegeted, rather than superseded, the Hebrew Bible's testimony to the God of Israel (see on this point Soulen 1996). The Old Testament is the authoritative Scripture of the New. It is against this background that Walter Moberly in chapter 12 assesses the Christian confession of the 'real' Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah of Israel. How can that extraordinary claim be understood in light of a critical and historical reading of the Old Testament, or indeed in view of a history that appears to continue unredeemed? Moberly assesses the evangelists' handling of Scripture in light of Old Testament theology, contemporary Jewish hopes, and the early Christians' own messianism.

The next two chapters turn from the biblical negotiation of the 'real' Jesus to the place of that apostolic Jesus in theology and faith through the ages. First, Alan Torrance traces the history of Jesus in Christian doctrine, with special reference to the development of christology and soteriology (chapter 13). From ancient conflicts about the divinity and the humanity of Jesus to Enlightenment debates and the Barmen Declaration, the history of theology shows that the problem of the one and the many continued to

surface in the conflict between a domesticated Jesus of human agendas and Jesus as the divine Word to humanity.

In chapter 14, Archbishop Rowan Williams provides the 'spiritual' counterpart to chapter 13: a survey of faith in Jesus in the history of Christian piety, covering a broad sweep from the beginnings of Christ-devotion via the patristic and medieval periods to more recent developments both in eastern Orthodoxy and in Catholic and evangelical movements in the west. The very vastness of this terrain provides eloquent confirmation of the historical weight of Jesus' 'presence', whose importance this *Companion to Jesus* highlights. Beyond that, however, Williams observes the uneasy relationship between the Jesus of theology and the history of his place in Christian piety: the latter's frequently relentless individualism and sentimentalism has too often hijacked Jesus in the service of favourite causes or fantasies. Devotion to Jesus is both utterly intrinsic to Christian faith and yet derives its rightful validity only from a Trinitarian framework that facilitates a movement into Jesus' relation with the Father.

The 'history of Jesus' in theology and faith must not of course be mistaken, either in principle or in fact, for a history of the west. Jesus was an Asian and an infant refugee in Africa; and after 1,500 years of western Christendom his followers are once again most numerous in those continents. Teresa Okure, a Nigerian biblical scholar and missiologist, explores this new global reality of Jesus on the threshold of the third millennium in chapter 15. She finds in the biblical theology of universal creation and salvation the framework in which to develop the global appropriation of Jesus as enfleshed and inculturated Word of God.

This global significance of Jesus will necessarily find diverse local foci. Jesus of Nazareth himself, of course, bound his own fate to that of the people of Israel – and, reluctantly but deliberately, to Jerusalem in particular. Twenty centuries later, Jerusalem is at once revitalised and deeply riven with ancient divisions. Sacred to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, it is paradoxically symbolic of a late modern world that remains both global village and tribal killing field, a place in which the rhetoric of a partisan justice is forever threatening to suffocate the truth of mercy. Against this background, David Burrell's chapter 16 sketches the city's painful history from the patristic period via Persian, Muslim and Crusader conquests to the Jewish resettlement in the shadow of gathering attempts to eradicate the Jewish people. His account leads up to the conflicts of our own day, which include the complex threat to Christianity's very survival in the Holy Land. He concludes that Jerusalem remains today 'iconic' for all three major religions, and that the work of the Spirit of Jesus will be seen in empowering each to animate peace.

After two millennia have passed, what, if anything, is the abiding significance of Jesus for the future of the world? What sense might remain in the early Christian belief that Jesus came to save the world and will return to judge and rule it? In the closing chapter 17, Richard Bauckham provides a kind of synthesis of many of the interlocking themes of this book. Documenting the early Christian hope in a future that belongs to Jesus, Bauckham argues that, despite its virtual displacement in much modern theology, Christianity needs to recover that focus in the coming Jesus who transcends his own past history and ours, and whose parousia will be seen to redeem and fulfil every present in the service of God.

It seems in the end a fitting point of convergence for this *Companion to Jesus* to note that the contingencies of history and the exalted claims of christology are at one on the subject of that ultimate horizon: the message of Jesus is a call to be transformed in the redeeming kingdom of Israel's God.

Part I

The Jesus of history

1 Context, family and formation

CRAIG A. EVANS

The so-called Third Quest of the historical Jesus has been marked by a variety of portraits. Jesus has been depicted as a rabbi, a sage, a prophet, a philosopher (perhaps even a Cynic), a holy man and a Messiah. What lies behind these discrepancies is a lack of consensus about context and differing assessments of source materials. The present chapter will treat three important areas of Jesus' background: (1) context, (2) family and (3) formation.[1] Of special interest will be the extent of the Jewishness or Hellenisation of Galilee in Jesus' day and the question of how well trained in Scripture Jesus was.

CONTEXT

Galilee of the early first century AD was profoundly Jewish, though a thin veneer of Graeco-Roman culture was present.[2] Agriculturally rich and strategically situated, Galilee was a region over which the Roman Empire maintained firm political control, alternately through client rulers (viz. the Herodian dynasty) or through the direct administration of Roman governors. Galilee measures some 69 km from north to south, and some 49 km from east to west. Although most of this territory ranges in elevation from 600 m to 1200 m above sea level, Lake Gennesaret (or popularly Sea of Galilee), some 21 km in length (north to south) and 5–11 km wide, is situated about 215 m below sea level. In the time of Jesus the lake supported (and still supports) a thriving fishing industry (cf. Strabo, *Geog.* 16.2; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 5.15; Josephus, *J.W.* 3.506–508; Mark 1.16–20 parr.; Luke 5.1–10; John 21.1–11).

The development of major cities at Tiberias (on the west bank of Lake Gennesaret) and Sepphoris (*c.* 6 km north-west of Nazareth), and the discovery of impressive Graeco-Roman architecture and artefacts, have led some scholars to exaggerate the extent of the Hellenisation of Galilee. Accordingly, some have suggested that the Jewish people of Galilee were for the most part not strict in the observance of their faith and that Graeco-Roman