Another Jesus?

False Messiahs Then & Now

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Another Jesus

• The apostle Paul, writing to one of his churches, rebuked them for being open to lies about Jesus:

• 2 Cor 11:4 (NASU) For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or [if] you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear [this] beautifully.
False Christs

• Even earlier, Jesus warned of imposters who would try to substitute for himself:
  • Mark 13:22 (NASU) for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect.
  • We want to consider how this has happened in the past and today.
Overview

We will subdivide our discussion into three headings:

• Another Historical Jesus
• Another Spiritual Jesus
• Another Political Jesus

These categories will overlap somewhat, but represent different emphases.
Another Historical Jesus
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• What do we mean by "another historical Jesus"?

• Though the phrase could be taken in several ways, we will understand it this way:

• "Writings or teachings in which Jesus is pictured quite differently than he is in the New Testament Gospels."
Another Historical Jesus

• This term arises from what is probably the most famous survey of writings on this topic, Albert Schweitzer's *Quest of the Historical Jesus* (English Transl 1910).

• Schweitzer sketches over 100 retellings of the life of Jesus, from the perspective of theological liberalism, written between the late 1700s and the early 1900s.
Another Historical Jesus

• But such retellings did not begin in the 1700s, nor end early in the 1900s, nor have they all have had the same liberal perspective.

• The first retellings, popular in the early centuries of Christianity, were what we now call the "Gnostic Gospels."
Gnostic Gospels

• Between perhaps AD 150-350, a number of pictures of Jesus were given from the theological perspective of Gnosticism.

• These include quite a few 'gospels,' of which the best-known today are:
  – The Gospel of Thomas
  – The Gospel of Mary (Magdalene)
  – The Gospel of Philip
  – The Gospel of Judas
What was Gnosticism?

• Gnosticism was a religious movement in which Christianity was combined with various themes from Greek philosophy & religion.

• It was characterized by belief that:
  – Matter is bad, but spirit is good.
  – The Creator is evil or (at best) ignorant.
  – The God of the OT is not the God of the NT.
  – Salvation is escape from the world of matter.
The Gnostic Jesus

• Naturally the Jesus that Gnosticism pictures is very different from the Jesus of the NT.
• The Gnostic Jesus:
  – …seems to do nothing but teach.
  – …teaches in secret to a small group.
  – …only appears to have a physical body.
  – …does not die on the cross.
  – …despises those who worship the Creator.
• Interest in Gnosticismism has revived in recent years since the publication of the Nag Hammadi papyri.
Recent Jesus Pictures

• Since Schweitzer wrote, there has been a revival of different pictures of Jesus in the late 20th century.

• These include:
  – Jesus Christ Superstar
  – The Jesus of the Passover Plot
  – Jesus the Magician
  – The Jesus of the Da Vinci Code
Jesus Christ Superstar

• Rock opera (1971) & film (1973) by Andrew Lloyd-Weber & Tim Rice

• The Plot:
  – Jesus is a superstar religious guru, but his fame goes to his head.
  – Begins believing what others say about him (that he is God), leading to the cross.
  – Blames God, but dies anyway.
  – Judas speaks from grave, also blames God.
  – No resurrection
The Passover Plot

- Book (1966) by Hugh J. Schonfield
- Here Jesus has (almost) everything under control:
  - Learns to interpret prophecy
  - Decides he is Messiah
  - Sets out to fulfill prophecy
  - Stages triumphal entry
  - Blows Judas’ mind
  - Times events so only on cross briefly
  - (But speared by soldier)
  - Revived in tomb, sends message, dies
Jesus the Magician

- Book (1978) by Morton Smith
- Jesus is a Gnostic magician
  - Possessed by a spirit
  - Claims to be deity
- Develops self-hypnosis
  - Claims to fly & teaches flying to disciples
  - Visits heaven, sees God
  - Freed by God from Law
The DaVinci Code

- A murder mystery (2003), set in the present
- Yet the plot turns on the idea that Jesus:
  - was merely human
  - he had children
  - the Holy Grail is Jesus' royal blood-line, not the cup at the Last Supper.
New Age Movement

• Besides these retellings of the life of Christ, other pictures of Jesus have arisen with the New Age movement.

• The New Age movement resembles the old Gnosticism in being a combination of other religious ideas with Christianity, but these come from westernized versions of Hinduism and Buddhism rather than from Greek philosophy & religion.
New Age Movement

• Like Gnosticism, the New Age movement is characterized by a diverse group of beliefs taught by various gurus, rather than a single, unified system.

• Some characteristic features of the New Age movement include:
  – Reincarnation
  – Individualism
  – Humans can rise to levels of being above humanity

• Here we give two New Age pictures of Jesus, those of Edgard Cayce & Benjamin Crème.
Edgar Cayce's Jesus

• Jesus became the Christ (Edgar Cayce's Story of Jesus [1969] 16, 42) …
  – …thru acceptance of God’s will
• Jesus exemplifies the universal Christ-consciousness (16, 42).
• Jesus became aware he would be Savior of the world when he fell in Eden (23).
Jesus' Previous Incarnations

- Amilius of Atlantis
- Adam
- Enoch
- Melchizedek
- Joseph
- Joshua
- Zend (father of Zoroaster)
- And others (23, 28, 37).
Jesus & Mary

• Jesus sinned in at least some of these incarnations (23).
• His mother, Mary, did not sin in her incarnation as his mother (27-28).
• She had no human father either!
• In a previous incarnation, she was Eve, the twin-soul of Jesus.
Benjamin Crème's Christ

- The Christ is the Master of all Masters, but not God; He is a Son of God, and so are we (Reappearance of the Christ & the Masters of Wisdom [1980], 115).
- The Christ is not an individual but an office … held (for the past 26,000 years) by Lord Maitreya.
- He was manifested in Palestine by overshadowing his disciple Jesus (RC 30).
Jesus & the Christ

- Jesus is not the Christ. He was, and still is, a Disciple of the Christ.
- He gave up his body for the use of the Christ, who took over ... his body from the baptism onwards.
- Jesus, in his next incarnation as Apollonius of Tyana, became a Master.
- He lives now (in a 600 year-old Syrian body) in Palestine (RC 46).
Another Historical Jesus

- Are any of these pictures really consistent with what is taught in the Gospels of the New Testament?
- No, but if people don't know what the Bible teaches, they are easily deceived by any charlatan that comes along.
- And if they reject what the Bible teaches, they have no one but themselves to blame for whatever consequences follow.
Another Historical Jesus

• From the perspective of the Bible, it is reasonable to think that these alternative pictures of Jesus are inspired by Satan, "The Father of Lies."

• CS Lewis, in his imaginative fiction *The Screwtape Letters* (1942), chapter 23, pictures a senior demon instructing his nephew on this subject:
CS Lewis on Another Jesus

"… this idea must be used by us to encourage once again the conception of a 'historical Jesus' to be found by clearing away later 'accretions and perversions' and then to be contrasted with the whole Christian tradition. In the last generation we promoted the construction of such a 'historical Jesus' on liberal and humanitarian lines; we are now putting forward a new 'historical Jesus' on Marxian, catastrophic and revolutionary lines. The advantages of these constructions, which we intend to change every thirty years or so, are manifold."
Another Historical Jesus

We need to be aware of this strategy and help people to see that the real historical Jesus is the Jesus of the Bible.
Another Spiritual Jesus
Another Spiritual Jesus

• What do we mean by "another spiritual Jesus"?

• Here we mean "someone who is the founder of a major religion, one who claims to do the sort of spiritual things that the Bible claims for Jesus":
  – Shows his followers what ultimate reality is like.
  – Helps them overcome life's obstacles.
  – Leads them to eternal life or the equivalent.
Another Spiritual Jesus

Before the time of Jesus, this would presumably include:

• Buddha
• Zoroaster
• Other less well-known figures.

Jesus was probably speaking of such as these when he said: (John 10:8, NIV) "All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them."
Another Spiritual Jesus

Since the time of Jesus, I would suggest (among others less well-known):

- Various Jewish persons professing to be the Messiah (e.g., Bar Kochba, Shabbati Zvi)
- Muhammad
- Emmanuel Swedenborg
- Joseph Smith
- Sung Myung Moon
Another Spiritual Jesus

To these we might add:

• Eastern Lightning, a messianic movement in China today

• Even in orthodox circles, the idea that Jesus is a vending machine or a 'Buddha' to give us health and wealth, rather than the One who is saving us from our sin and sending us out on His mission.
Another Spiritual Jesus

We should not be surprised about these, either, as they would fall under the Bible’s categories of false Christs and false prophets.
Another Political Jesus
Another Political Jesus

• What do we mean by "another political Jesus"?

• One of the defining characteristics of the OT Messiah is that he is to be the ruler of the world (see Daniel 7:13-14).

• So another political Jesus would be "one who attempts to be a world-ruler."
Ruler of the World

Dan 7:13 (NASU) I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. 14 And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and [men of every] language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed.
Another Political Jesus

Before the coming of Jesus, these would be such persons as:

- Nebuchadnezzar
- Alexander the Great
- Antiochus Epiphanes
- Caesar Augustus
Another Political Jesus

Since the coming of Jesus, we would include:

- Nero
- Muhammad
- Genghis Khan
- Napoleon
- Stalin
- Mao Tzedong

Plus many others who were not as successful as these.
Putting It Together
Putting It Together

• What do we get when we try to put together the historical, spiritual, and political attempts to replace Jesus?

• Collectively, we may call these "antichrists," as does the apostle John.

• He says they were already around in his own time:
Antichrists

1 John 2:18 (NASU) Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they were not [really] of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but [they went out], so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.
The Antichrist

- John distinguishes these antichrists from "the antichrist" who is coming.
- This is seen more clearly in Jesus' Olivet Discourse, in Paul's remarks about the "man of lawlessness," and in the picture of the "beast" in Revelation.
The Abomination of Desolation

Matt 24:15 (NASU) Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16 then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains; 17 Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. 18 Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. 19 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 20 But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. 21 For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.
The Lawless One

2 Thess 2:5 (NASU) Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? 6 And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains [will do so] until he is taken out of the way. 8 Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; 9 [that is], the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, 10 and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.
The Beast

Rev 13:1 (NASU) And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns [were] ten diadems, and on his heads [were] blasphemous names. 2 And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like [those] of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority. 3 [I saw] one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed [and followed] after the beast; 4 they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?"
Conclusions

Beware of False Prophets!
Conclusions

• The Lord wants us, without becoming paranoid, to know what is going on around us:
  – Historically
  – Spiritually
  – Politically

• The Lord wants us to help others see who Jesus is, and flee to Him as our only hope.
The End

Flee to Jesus!
For Further Information

• On:
  – Gnosticism
  – The New Age Movement
  – Liberal Lives of Jesus
  – Biblical Prophecy

• See our website:
  – www.ibri.org