

Christianity

Joshua the Galilean was a Palestinian Jew who lived before the destruction of the second Jerusalem temple. Some claimed he was the return of the king of the line of David, which post-Babylonian Jews hoped to restore Israel. Until then, God seemed untouchable and unknowable, transcendent. Now he is called Immanuel, God who dwelt among us.

It may seem superstitious to accept the fantastic claims of a would be Messiah who performed miracles. The Jewish leaders of the day convicted him of sorcery. Paul Kurtz [K] suggested that he was a magician. As Messiah, at first he seemed a failure. He died one of the most tortuous, humiliating deaths known to man. His disciples fled in terror after his crucifixion, afraid that they would share his fate (which most in the end did).

His disciples then claimed that he rose from the dead. This claim is recorded as being witnessed by approximately 500 people who believed that they had encountered him after he had died from crucifixion. Was this a hoax? The arguments for a hoax are not convincing.

The Christian message of good news is a profession of hope. Perhaps this hope is foolish. Perhaps political tragedies such as the crusades, spurred on by Western Christian indulgences for every Muslim heretic killed while defending Jerusalem, are the great bane of the Christian claim. However, the teachings of Jesus remain, carried down by word of mouth and liturgical gospels, ultimately teaching a message of God's kingdom: a kingdom of love, caring, redemption, and fulfilment in relationship, with God and our neighbour. By their fruits shall ye know them, Jesus said. Where Christians have succeeded, they have born the fruits of peace, love in community, and charity. Where God is, by definition, capable of intervention in the created world, perhaps miracles are the one hope that Christian experience finds to be the most real in a world scarred by pain, suffering, and fear.

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References

[K] Paul Kurtz, 1986, *The Transcendental Temptation: A Critique of Religion and the Paranormal*, Prometheus Books.

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