



# THE UNEXPECTED JESUS

*The Truth Behind His Biblical Names*



R. C. SPROUL



**CHRISTIAN FOCUS**





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# INTRODUCTION







In the last summer of Jesus' earthly ministry, before he went to Jerusalem to be executed, he and his disciples faced a severe crisis.

Sometimes, when we think about the life and ministry of Jesus, we telescope the events surrounding it, and think of him walking from town to town in Galilee, and coming back and forth out of Jerusalem, followed constantly by thronging multitudes pressing up against him, all of them wanting to hear every word that came out of his mouth.

Actually, if we look carefully at the record of the earthly ministry of Jesus, we will see that public opinion regarding Jesus was similar to the New York Stock Market; it was that volatile, it went up and down.

There were times, towards the beginning of his public ministry, when the people were clamouring with enthusiasm as they watched Jesus perform a miracle here in Cana and then in Capernaum, and so on. But then there came a point in his public ministry, where, to the best of our ability to discern the historical situ-





ation, people became disenchanted and disillusioned with what Jesus was doing.

This change in attitude towards Jesus increased after he had fed over five thousand people from only five loaves and two fish. The incident occurred near to the Sea of Galilee and we can read the details in John 6. The people, after they were fed, demanded that Jesus become their king. When he refused, and explained to them that they were following him for the wrong reasons, they became angry and left him. As these disciples left, Jesus turned to the few that remained, and asked, 'You do not want to leave too, do you?' It was Peter who replied, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.'

But not only were the common people in Galilee changing their attitude towards Jesus, growing consolidated opposition was taking place in Jerusalem. The religious authorities there had been outraged by the teaching of Jesus, and especially his criticisms of them. They conspired to set traps for Jesus so that they could destroy him (Mark 3:6). Also, Herod Antipas, who presided over Judea, was becoming very suspicious of what he saw as Jesus' political ambitions and he was keeping a watchful eye over Jesus' activities (Luke 9:9; 13:31).

All of these things came together and produced a climate in and around Jerusalem, and throughout the whole area of Judea, that made it unsafe for Jesus to remain there.





The portrait of Jesus in the New Testament is not that of a coward who flees from confrontations, far from it. But there were occasions where he said, ‘My hour is not yet come’ (John 7:6, 30; 8:20). It is as if Jesus was saying, ‘I will determine the place and the time of the ultimate confrontation that I am going to have with the authorities. I am not going to go by their agenda or their timetable.’

Therefore when this time of crisis came, Jesus, with a few of his disciples, went into retreat and left Jerusalem and Judea and travelled up to the northern tip of Galilee. There, in relative seclusion from the masses, Jesus and his disciples spent a short time in a little town called Caesarea Philippi. (We shouldn’t confuse Caesarea Philippi with the city on the Mediterranean coast called Caesarea that was built in honour of the emperor Caesar Augustus and had grown to become one of the largest cities in Palestine.)

Caesarea Philippi was inland, and had been rebuilt by Philip, the Tetrarch of that area, in honour not of Augustus Caesar, but of Tiberias Caesar. It was located near to Mount Hermon, near to the little springs and brooks that together fed the starting point for the River Jordan. There Jesus took his disciples aside and asked a crisis question.

It is basically that question — who is Jesus? — that we are going to be examining in the first section of six chapters. Then in the second section, also of six chapters, we will look at what the Bible says Jesus did and of some of the ways we have benefited from his work.

