

FACTS OF FAITH

Christianity, eh? If you've ever wondered what it's all about then Dorset writer **David Lawrence Preston** can supply you with some answers, 201 of them to be precise

By Faith Eckersall

David's book has identified a whole host of things that he reckons we don't know about Christianity – but maybe should. And the most important thing, he claims, is that Jesus wasn't really called Jesus but Yeshua bar Yehosef (Aramaic for "son of Joseph").

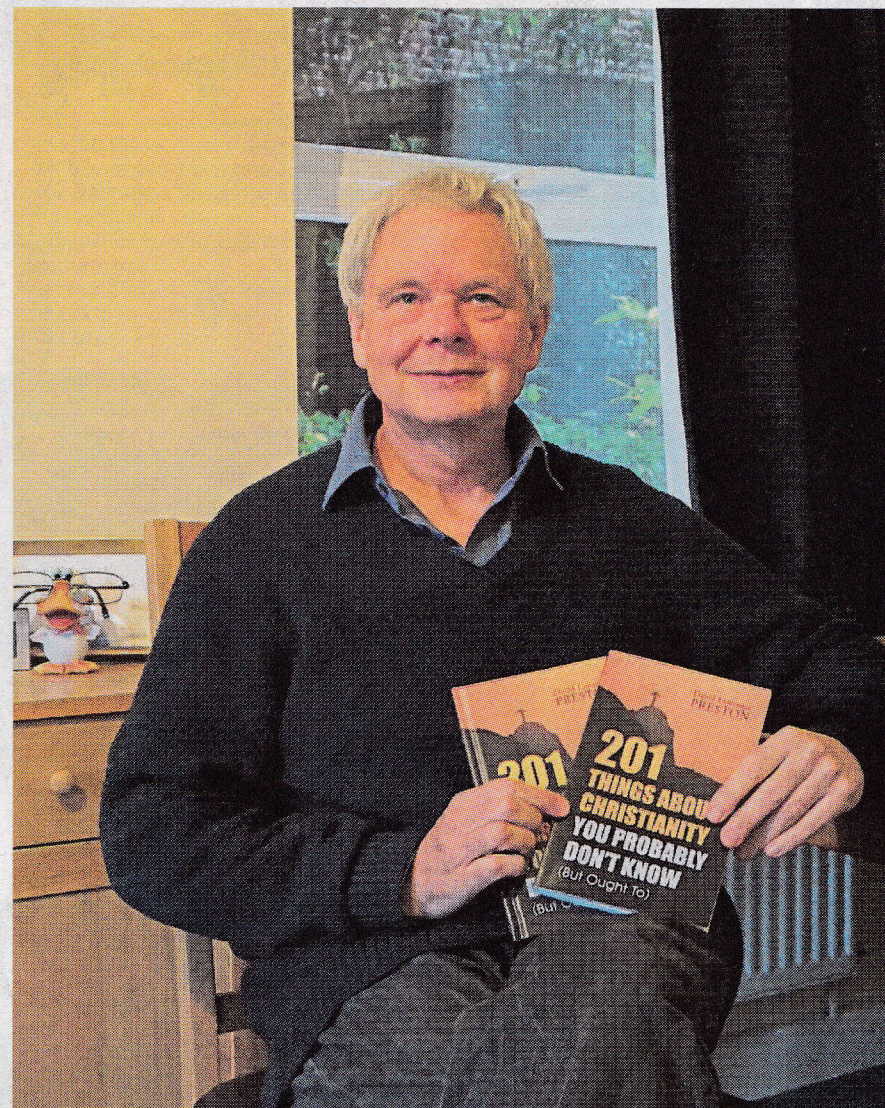
"All the books of the New Testament were originally written in Greek, not Hebrew or Latin as commonly supposed," he says. "When it came to putting the New Testament together in the third century the monk who was working on it decided to stick with the name Jesus." We also don't know what Jesus really looked like. "Yeshua would have resembled any rural Galilean Jewish male of that era," says David. "Remains of poor Jewish men from that time reveal they were short by today's standards, thick-set, dark-skinned, bearded and with dark, tousled hair." So nothing like the pale, reddish-haired character depicted in so many of the world's greatest paintings, then. The gospels all contradict each other, birth stories were added and the resurrection is described differently, says David.

"Matthew wrote for a Jewish audience to try and portray Jesus as the embodiment of the Old Testament philosophies and Luke picked up on the idea that there was more interest in spreading the word." David's book also explains why the Bible appears in thrall to the number 40: 40 days and 40 nights is the length of time Jesus is said to have spent fasting, it's how long Noah's flood lasted and how long it will pour if it rains on St Swithun's Day.

"Forty was a mystical number in Judaism," he says. "Another significant number is 12; that's why there were 12 disciples, to take charge of the 12 Tribes of Israel and restore what Yeshua hoped would be the natural order of things."

What this erudite book doesn't explain, of course, is just why David is so interested in all this. Especially as he describes himself as "not particularly religious".

"I was brought up as a God-fearing Christian by my parents but whenever I heard ministers giving a sermon I always wanted to put my hand up and say 'hang on a moment', what about this or that and question what



they were saying," he says. "The book is designed to be fairly factual and not trying to disrespect anybody but pointing out some discrepancies." His writing is just one fact of a string of careers he's enjoyed: as the global training manager of an energetic medicine company, working with Bournemouth Adult Learning as a hypnotherapist, and also a business lecturer at

Bournemouth University. He's even stood for parliament but is now working on his next book: "Showing the positive things we can learn from Christianity." The books of the Bible may not be literally true, he says, but he has enormous respect for their value.

• **201 Things About Christianity You Probably Don't Know (But Ought To)** Balboa Press, Hay House Publishing.