

WHO'S PLAYING  
**JESUS GAMES?**

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## WHO'S PLAYING JESUS GAMES?

“Oh, what shall I do?” sobbed Jenny. “Is this just a big con? All my life I’ve prayed, loved Jesus and taught my children to trust Him. And now...”

There was pleading in Jenny’s voice. Tears flooded down her cheeks. “Tell me, HAS IT ALL BEEN A LIE?” She wiped her reddened eyes and straightened up. “I must have the truth!”

Yes, I had been hearing the news. It turned out that a group of men calling themselves the Jesus Seminar, led by a Robert Funk, had exposed a colossal religious cover-up. This was as big as anything you’ll ever hear.

If true, it could overthrow the faith of a billion Christians. The claim was that Christianity was rooted in a huge hoax – or, at best, a gross misunderstanding of what really happened in the first century with a man called Jesus of Nazareth.

Was Jesus really a God-man? No. Had he come to earth to restore the severed relationship between individuals and their Creator? No. A good man he might have been. But there was nothing supernatural about him.

Yet, in time, his followers came to idolize him and later regard him as a god. Then the first writings about him were changed to reflect that later myth.

That's the story, plain and simple, according to the Jesus Seminar. The bottom line was this: that Christianity is just a **big game**, preying on the credulous public.

Well, what do you think? I suggest to you, that this is a serious charge – especially when you consider what Christians are taught. They're taught to trust Jesus as the Son of God, for their eternal destiny, even to die for these claims. But if the claims are not true, then Christianity is the most unprincipled deception in all history.

In any case, I could not let it rest. With my background as a skeptic, I could understand the Jesus Seminar's point of view. And let's face it, if they had hard evidence, then honesty would compel me to go with it – and let others know.

Thus was launched what turned out to be a long voyage of investigation.

Another claim was also doing the rounds – not from Funk's but another group. This was even more radical, if you please – that Jesus never existed at all. So that was added to the parameters of my investigation.

Here, then, was the list of claims that needed to be probed:

- 1. *Jesus never existed.*** *Writers during the alleged time of Jesus don't mention him.*
- 2. *It was Constantine and his bishops that turned Jesus into a god as late as the fourth century of the Christian era.***
- 3. *All of the New Testament gospels were written decades after the time that Jesus purportedly lived. They are not contemporary accounts.***
- 4. *The New Testament writings were changed.***
- 5. *In early Christian writings there were numerous other gospels, those***

*that did not make it into the Bible, relating stories about Jesus that also contradict the four biblical gospels.*

**6. *The Bible is full of contradictions, such as glaring differences in the stories told of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The four biblical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) don't report the same story. For example, on Jesus' genealogy, they contradict each other.***

Yes, considering, as you and I know, that Jesus has captured the affections of so many people, these sudden “revelations” were serious. My investigation would cover twelve years and take me into as many countries.

You are now about to receive the benefit of some exciting archaeological discoveries and years of ground-breaking research, as we shall piece together compelling evidence about the real origin of Christianity.

I don't care if you're skeptical. Or if you've been conned over and over. Or if you think you'd rather suffer a pointless existence than get let down by some fake Christian.

Because I aim to pour bucket after bucket of ice-cold water on your head until you wake up and seize this information opportunity that's helped literally thousands of people.... just like you... build undeniable new, fulfilled lives... just by getting the facts right – and knowing how to benefit from them.

Here's what you'll find in this report:

- Did contemporary historians say anything about Jesus?
- Is the idea of Jesus as God a late invention – a conspiracy?
- Do independent records from Cyprus, Turkey, India, Egypt and Israel confirm or refute the New Testament story?
- Is evidence being covered up... resisted... and denied?
- Jesus' alleged post-resurrection appearances: were they only visions?

- Why do two Gospel genealogies of Jesus “contradict” each other?
- Are there really 200,000 contradictions in the New Testament?
- Why are there “glaring differences” in the four Gospels’ stories of Jesus’ life?
- Learn why critics give late dates for the New Testament Gospels.
- Do the Dead Sea Scrolls prove an early or late date for the Gospels?
- Is there really an unbroken line of document preservation from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
- Why did “Christians” in India burn thousands of Bibles?
- Why do some scholars prefer theories over evidence? And non-existent books to real, surviving books?
- Shorthand: was it really used in the first century?
- If Peter and John were illiterate (as claimed in the book of Acts), how, then, did they write the books attributed to them?
- Oral tradition: how reliable is it?
- True or false: Did Jesus employ special devices to ensure accurate transmission of his message?
- Amazing comparisons between the Iliad, the Mahabharata and the Bible

Who is lying to us? Are you ready? Let’s go...

## **PART 1**

# **IS JESUS HISTORICAL OR NOT?**



# 1

## No early historical mention of Jesus?

The words fairly leapt out at me: “Jesus never existed! Writers during the alleged time of Jesus don’t mention him.”

Laying down the book, I gazed out through the window, pondering.

“Jerry said something similar,” I mused. “What was it, exactly?” Turning back to my desk, I clicked onto his email. Jerry was a dear friend, who lived in Canada. An honest fellow, is Jerry. And, a successful entrepreneur, knowledgeable in his chosen field. He is no moron. So I took on board his statement.

“I could not find any early historians speaking of Jesus,” said Jerry, “although in India I did come across an unconfirmed legend of him... otherwise nothing.”

As an archaeologist I am doomed to dig. You can take that literally or metaphorically. Anyway, the search began.

It soon became apparent that the “Jesus never existed” idea was of fairly recent vintage, first raised by some writers in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In approaching this subject, it is well to stand two things in mind:

1. During his brief public ministry, Jesus was comparatively unknown in the Roman Empire.
2. If, as claimed, he spoke publicly for only three years, it would be highly unlikely for any historical documents from within such a narrow window of time to have survived.

Yet, despite these two facts, I would soon discover that even men like the American revolutionary Thomas Paine, who held Christianity in utter contempt, did not question the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth.

Further digging uncovered the fact that Jesus' alleged words and actions *were* documented by numerous people. Then copied by thousands of others, to be passed on – despite the threat of death for doing so.

As it turned out, to my surprise there was actually far more documentary evidence for the existence of Jesus than for virtually any person in ancient history.

It would soon become obvious that anyone peddling that “Christ-myth” theory did NOT do so on the ground of historical evidence. The *fact* of Jesus Christ in history was as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as is the fact of Julius Caesar. It was *not historians* who were promoting the “Christ-myth” notion.

In fact, one would be hard pressed to find very many knowledgeable people today who agree that Jesus never existed.

It staggered me to discover that Jesus' life was attested to by no fewer than 22 different historians of his day, such as Tacitus, Suetonius, Serapian, Phlegon, Lucian, Josephus. Many of these historians were antagonistic toward him. He was mentioned in at least four official Roman records.

## **JESUS IN EARLY RECORDS**

### ***1. Cornelius Tacitus (b. AD 52 – 56)***

P. Cornelius Tacitus was born around AD 55. He was a Roman senator, consul, governor of Britain AD 80 – 84, and also served as governor of the Roman province of Anatolia (which covered most of the area of modern day Turkey). And he was one of ancient Rome's greatest historians. Late in his life, he wrote a 16-volume history of the Roman emperors, called the *Annals*.

Tacitus was neither a friend of Nero, nor of the Christians.

And he mentions that Pontius Pilate crucified Jesus Christ. He wrote this in his history:

Nothing which could be done by man, nor any amount of treasure that the prince could give, nor all the sacrifices which could be presented to the gods, could clear Nero from being believed to have ordered the burning, the fire of Rome. So to silence the rumor, he tortured and made false accusations against those who were hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty [crucifixion] during the reign of Tiberius at the hand of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome. (*Annals*, 15:44)

Tiberius reigned from AD 14 to 37. Pilate held office from AD 26 to 36 or 37. The burning of Rome (for which the followers of Jesus Christ were blamed) was in AD 64.

Cornelius Tacitus may have been *the greatest* Roman historian. He held the positions of senator, consul, and provincial governor of Asia. He wrote *Annals*, *Histories*, *Agricola*, *Germany*, and a dialogue on oratory.

Tacitus was a *scrupulous* historian who paid careful attention to his historical works. (*Wikipedia*)

You can depend on his historical trustworthiness. He was contemporary with many of the events he records.

I asked a critic, “So you accept as historical every other event this historian writes about?”

“Yes,” he conceded.

“But this one thing you reject - his mention of Jesus Christ?”

“Yes.”

“Then perhaps the trouble is not with the historian, but with you. Are you an honest man?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Then if you are honest, then re-examine your own motives. *Be skeptical of your skepticism.*”

## **2. Governor Pontius Pilate’s report (31 to 37 AD):**

Evidently, Pontius Pilate sent a report back to Rome concerning the trial of Jesus.

Around AD 150, Justin Martyr urged the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius to consult this report in the imperial archives:

The statement, “They spiked my hands and my feet” he says, are they not an accurate portrayal of the nails that were fixed in his hands and his feet on the cross, and after he was executed, those who crucified him cast lots and divided his clothing amongst themselves; these things did occur, and you may find them in the ‘*Acts*’ recorded under Pontius Pilate.

He later says:

At his coming the lame shall leap, tongues that stammer shall speak clearly, the blind shall see, and the lepers shall be cleansed, and the dead shall rise and walk about. And you can learn that he did all these things from the *Acts* of Pontius Pilate. (Justin Martyr, *Apology*, 1.48)

Although there are claims that a copy of this letter exists today, I am aware of no indisputable evidence that such a letter has

survived. In any case, its survival is not pivotal to our case. However, the bottom line is this: there is no valid reason to dispute Justin's claim.

### **3. Caius Suetonius Tranquillus (c. AD 69 - 140)**

Another testimony is from Tranquillus, overseer of Rome's libraries and court official to several emperors. He writes that the emperor Claudius "banished the Jews from Rome, who were continually making disturbances, Chrestus [Christ] being their leader." (*Lives of the First Twelve Caesars: Life of Claudius*, 26.2)

This banishment of Jews from Rome occurred in AD 49. It is also mentioned in the Bible, in Acts 18:2. Tranquillus, again, was a contemporary of some of the original Christian leaders.

### **4. Pliny the younger (AD 112)**

Pliny the younger, the Roman legate of Bithynia-Pontus (what is now north-central Turkey) in the early second century, wrote to the emperor Trajan, requesting advice on how to deal with Christians who refused to reverence Caesar's image. Pliny noted that these Christians met regularly and sang hymns "to Christ as if to a god." (*Letters* 10:96.7)

In Pliny "Christ" is not treated merely as someone Christians "believe in" but as an actual figure that exists and is regarded "as a god" - the phrase here would indicate that someone who would not ordinarily be perceived as a god (in Roman eyes) was here being accorded the status of deity, and this points to someone who was (again, in Roman eyes) a known, supposedly mortal person.

From these historical sources (NONE connected in any way with the Bible) we note that:

1. A group called "Christians" derived its name from "Christus" (Christ), as early as c. AD 49.
2. This "Christus" was executed during the offices of Tiberius and Pilate, before AD 37.

3. This new movement involved “a most mischievous superstition”, possibly a reference to Christians’ belief that Jesus rose from the dead after his crucifixion.
4. This Christian movement began in Judea and spread to Rome.
5. Early Christians considered Christ to be a divine Being.

### ***5. Mara Bar-Serapion (sometime later than AD 73)***

There is the testimony of a first century Syrian writer. In the British Museum an interesting manuscript preserves the text of a letter sent by a Syrian named Mara Bar-Serapion, from prison, to his son Serapion. To encourage his son in the pursuit of wisdom, he points out that those who persecuted wise men were themselves overtaken by misfortune. He gives as examples the deaths of Socrates, Pythagoras and Jesus Christ:

What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as a judgment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King? It was just after that that their kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men: the Athenians died of hunger; the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea; the Jews, ruined and driven from their land, live in complete dispersion. But Socrates did not die for good; he lived on in the teaching of Plato. Pythagoras did not die for good; he lived on in the statue of Hera. Nor did the wise King die for good; He lived on in the teaching which He had given. (Quoted by F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 5<sup>th</sup> revised edition. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1972)

Now we turn to some further early Jewish documents. I say to the critic, dispute them if you wish. But don't come up with that nonsense that these documents refer to somebody else.

### **6. Babylonian Sanhedrin (AD 95-110)**

The Jewish Babylonian Sanhedrin, from AD 95 – 110, testifies:

“On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, ‘He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced magic and led Israel astray. Any one who can say anything in his favor let him come forward and plead on his behalf.’ But since nothing was brought forward in his favor he was hanged on the eve of the passover!” (Babylonian Talmud *Sanhedrin* 43a – “Eve of Passover”. Compare t. Sanh. 10:11; y. sanh. 7:12; Tg. Esther 7:9)

Another version of this text says, “Yeshu the Nazarene”.

New Testament details confirmed by this passage include

- \* Jesus’ “magic” or miracle acts
- \* that he “led [astray] many in Israel”
- \* the fact of the crucifixion
- \* the time of the crucifixion
- \* the intent of the Jewish religious leaders to kill Jesus.

### **7. Rabbi ben Hyrcanus (c. AD 95)**

Around AD 95, Jewish rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus of Lydda speaks of Jesus’ magic arts. (Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story*. Translated by Richard and Clara Winston. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960, p. 10)

## **8. Jewish controversy (c. AD 110)**

Around 110 we hear of a controversy among Palestinian Jews centering upon the question of whether it is permissible to be healed in the name of Jesus. (*Ibid.*)

The point here is, miraculous healings in the name of Jesus do imply that Jesus performed such miracles... not to mention that he existed.

Did Jewish authorities deny that Jesus worked miracles? Indeed not. But they claimed these were acts of sorcery.

Despite the hatred of many Jewish leaders for Jesus Christ and Christianity, they *never question the historical reality* of Jesus Christ. His coming is part of their history – quite independently of Christianity. And *Jewish leaders* still recognise this, today.

Jesus' alleged illegitimate birth was a slur among the Jews.

Jewish scholars have always conceded that the Jesus Christ of Christianity lived. He is the most influential “imposter” in their history. This they have never disputed.

The point is that the Jewish people, from their own separate history, do not question that Jesus Christ really and truly lived and died - as the Gospels portray it.

Israel Shahak in *Jewish History, Jewish Religion* (p. 97) writes:

According to the Talmud, Jesus was executed by a proper rabbinical court for idolatry, inciting other Jews to idolatry, and contempt of rabbinical authority. All classical Jewish sources which mention His execution are quite happy to take responsibility for it; in the Talmudic account the Romans are not even mentioned.

The more popular accounts - which were nevertheless taken quite seriously - such as the notorious *Toldot Yesbu* are even worse, for in addition to the above crimes they accuse him of witchcraft (*Shabbos* 104b; *Sanhedrin* 43a).

The very name 'Jesus' was for Jews a symbol of all that is abominable, and this popular tradition still persists. (The Hebrew form of the name Jesus - Yeshu - was interpreted as an acronym for the curse "may his name and memory be wiped out," and which is used as an extreme form of abuse.)

In fact, anti-Zionist Orthodox Jews (such as Neturey Qarta) sometimes refer to Herzl as 'Herzl Jesus' and I have found in religious Zionist writings expressions such as 'Nasser Jesus' and more recently 'Arafat Jesus').

### ***A different Jesus of Nazareth?***

Some critics may argue that since Jesus never really existed, these Jewish references must apply to some other character.

May I then ask the skeptic, What would evoke such continuing strong feelings against Jesus, as are today still expressed?

If this was simply some man who was connected with a dead event far in the distant past, then why does his name evoke such powerful curses today?

Their attitude makes sense only if the Jesus they are cursing is one who founded something formidable - Christianity - which has now become a mighty force. That is why emotions rage so hot. There is no mistaking the fact that this is the Jesus of Christianity they are talking about – as historical in their minds, as Hitler.

And nothing else could explain the fact that the Gospels are equally detested, and they are not allowed to be quoted (let alone taught) even in modern Israeli Jewish schools.

The *Talmud* confirms the execution of Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity – NOT that of some other character.

Because *some* Talmudic passages place Jesus 100 years before

or after his actual lifetime, some Jewish apologists argue that these must therefore deal with a different Jesus of Nazareth. But this is *not how the most authoritative rabbinic interpreters*, medieval sages like Nachmanides, Rashi and the Tosaphists, *saw the matter*.

Maimonides, writing in 12th century Egypt, made clear that *the Talmud's Jesus* is the one who founded Christianity.

In his great summation of Jewish law and belief, the *Mishneh Torah*, he wrote of “Jesus of Nazareth, who imagined that he was the Messiah, but was put to death by the court.” In his *Epistle to Yemen*, Maimonides states:

Jesus of Nazareth interpreted the Torah and its precepts in such a fashion as to lead to their total annulment. The sages, of blessed memory, having become aware of his plans before his reputation spread among our people, meted out fitting punishment to him.

David Klinghoffer, a columnist for the Jewish *Forward Magazine* wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* (January 1, 2004):

The Talmud was compiled in about AD 500, drawing on rabbinic material that had been transmitted orally for centuries. From the 16th century on, the text was censored and passages about Jesus and His execution erased to evade Christian wrath. But the full text was preserved in older manuscripts, and today the censored parts may be found in minuscule type, as an appendix at the back of some Talmud editions.

A relevant example comes from the Talmudic division Sanhedrin, which deals with procedures of the Jewish high court: “On the eve of Passover they hung Jesus of Nazareth. And the herald went out before him for 40 days [saying, ‘Jesus] goes forth to be stoned, because he has practiced magic, enticed and led astray Israel. Any-

one who knows anything in his favor, let him come and declare concerning him.’ And they found nothing in his favor.”

In the Mishnah the rabbinic work on which the Talmud is based, compiled about AD 200, Rabbi Eliezer explains that anyone who was stoned to death would then be hung by his hands from two pieces of wood shaped like a capital letter T, in other words, a cross.

### **9. Flavius Josephus (AD 37-100)**

Josephus, a prominent Jewish historian of the first century, commanded a Jewish detachment in Galilee during the Jewish revolt of AD 66-70, until his capture by the Romans. At the end of the war he went to Rome with the Roman general Titus, where he lived and wrote until his death.

In his monumental work *Antiquities of the Jews*, written AD 90-95, Josephus says:

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, - a teacher of such men as received the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them live again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day. (*Antiquities*, Book 18, chapter 3, section 3)

Some will claim that must be an interpolation – because it is unlikely that Josephus, a Jew, would affirm Jesus to be the Messiah who had fulfilled prophecies, done miraculous deeds, and risen from the dead.

On the surface, this objection might appear to have some merit. However, there are other factors that need to be considered:

F.F. Bruce suggests that the phrase “if indeed we should call him a man” may very well indicate that the text is authentic but that Josephus is writing with tongue in cheek in sarcastic reference to Christian belief that Jesus is the Son of God. (F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter Varsity Press, 1964, p. 108)

Other scholars have suggested amending the text in ways to preserve its authenticity without the implication that Josephus personally accepted that Jesus was the Messiah. (*Ibid.*, pp. 110-111)

While some scholars dispute parts or all of the passage, it is quoted as above by the historian Eusebius as early as 315 (*Ecclesiastical History*, 1.11). Also the manuscript evidence favors it. It exists in all extant copies of Josephus’ works.

Still, if one chooses to dismiss the above versions of Josephus, that is fine.

But how shall we regard the following extant version of Josephus discovered among the Arabs? This was beyond the control of any alleged “Christian” forgers. It is possible that this fourth century Arabic text (found in a tenth century Arabic manuscript) reflects the original intent:

At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good and [he] was known to be virtuous. Many people from among the Jews and other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive; accordingly, he was perhaps the messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.

This passage is found in the Arabic manuscript entitled *Kitab Al-Unwan Al-Mukallal Bi-Fadail Al-Hikma Al-Mutawwaj Bi-Anwa Al-Falsafa Al-Manduh Bi-Haqaq Al-Marifa*.

But even this passage is not essential to our case. Unfortunately for the critic, there still exists a second mention of Jesus by Josephus. And this one – found in all versions - is seldom disputed by scholars. It concerns the martyrdom of James, Jesus' half brother:

Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the Sanhedrin of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others [or some of his companions;] and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned. (*Antiquities*, Book 20, chapter 9, section 1)

Although Josephus was never a Christian, we do find in his works mention of many figures from the Gospels and other New Testament books. These include John the Baptizer (*Antiquities*, Book 18, chapter 5, section 2), the family of the Herods, the Judean procurators, and members of the high priestly families.

### ***Significance of these non-Christian witnesses***

So what is the bottom line? It's quite simple.

Accept Josephus or not, we have other independent references to Jesus the historical person – mainly from people who were *enemies* of Christianity.

In addition, there are some others which, although possibly authentic, cannot be confirmed as such. Therefore I have not listed them.

These come largely from Greek, Jewish, Samaritan and Roman sources of the first century.

What this means is that Christianity is rooted in history. Here we find non-Christian documents substantiating the fact that:

- (1) Jesus existed;
- (2) Jesus was from Nazareth;
- (3) he lived a wise and virtuous life;
- (4) he had a popular following;
- (5) he was crucified in Palestine under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius Caesar at Passover time, being considered the Jewish King;
- (6) he was believed by his disciples to have been raised from the dead three days later;
- (7) his enemies acknowledged that he performed unusual feats they called 'sorcery';
- (8) his small band of disciples multiplied rapidly, spreading even as far as Rome;
- (9) his disciples denied polytheism, lived moral lives, and worshiped Christ as Divine.

This picture confirms the view of Jesus presented in the New Testament Gospels.

### ***Jesus' existence denied on inadequate grounds***

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* concurs:

These independent accounts prove that in ancient times even the opponents of Christianity never doubted the historicity of Jesus, which was disputed for the first time and on inadequate grounds by several authors at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>, during the 19<sup>th</sup>, and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15<sup>th</sup> edition, 1974)

So Jesus Christ never existed! Well, yes. Then why do we find Him described by so many different and independent early sources?

Those documents were forged?

All of them? By both anti-christian Roman chroniclers and Jewish leaders?

Oh, come on. Let's be realistic. What motive would they have? Honestly, does anyone really think that all these independent lines of evidence were all just "made up"?

To suggest that *both* the official Roman chroniclers and the Jewish leaders would conspire to fake the existence of Jesus Christ is ludicrous. Please produce a rational motive. It would be AGAINST THEIR INTERESTS.

***Will the critic please answer***

So now I put aside my spade to ask the skeptic a question. Please explain: With Christianity's *claims about Jesus* sweeping the world and upturning kingdoms during the first, second, third and fourth centuries, please explain why is there *no evidence that the historicity of Jesus was ever questioned during those first few centuries?*

What is the response when you ask the critic this question? It tellingly goes unanswered.

When all has been said for and against, one clear fact needs to be admitted. These historical records do constitute powerful independent evidence that the Bible records concerning Jesus Christ are historical, and that such a person did exist.

Edwin Yamauchi, professor of history at Miami University, reminds us that we have more and better historical documentation for Jesus than for any other religious founder (e.g., Zoroaster, Buddha, or Mohammed). (Edwin Yamauchi, "Jesus Outside the New Testament: What is the Evidence?" *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*. Ed. By Michael J. Wilkins and J.P. Moreland. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995, pp. 221,222)

### ***Another question for the critic***

If the Founder of Christianity never actually existed, then please explain what motivated these to come into existence:

- (a) the rise of the Christian movement,
- (b) the writing of the Gospels and
- (c) the stream of non-Christian and Christian tradition that lies behind them.

### ***Why no statue or inscription with the name “Jesus”?***

Of course, the critic may well ask: If Jesus really lived and if he was such an important figure, then why has no statue or inscription been found with his name?

But the truth is quite simple – and even obvious – when you think about it. Jesus was not a prominent political figure – just an itinerant with few possessions, who died as an “outlaw”. Since all territories were ruled by Rome, would those Romans have honored his memory with a statue or inscription?

And as much to the point, Jerusalem was totally destroyed in 70 AD. Anything that still exists is buried under the modern city.

But it really boils down to this: The historicity of many other characters from the ancient world is accepted on much less evidence than this – often merely upon the single appearance of a name.

So should we not be consistent?

### ***10. Discovered artefacts with Jesus’ name:***

It was reported in 2003 that an ossuary was found, with an inscription reading, “James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus”. An

ossuary, by the way, is a medium sized box in which human bones were placed for permanent burial after the flesh had all decayed away. This custom was practised for but a brief period of time, between about 20 BC and 70 AD.

Now, since presently we cannot confirm this particular find as genuine – it has been labelled by some as a fraud – we shall not press this one for now... bearing in mind that alleged “frauds” have often proved to be the real thing. Again, it is not essential to our case.

However, in 1945 Eleazar L. Sukenik discovered two other ossuaries close to Jerusalem.

These ossuaries were found in a tomb that was in use before AD 50. There was ancient graffiti on them.

The writings read *Iesous iou* and *Iesous aloth*. Also present were four crosses. It is likely that the first is a prayer to Jesus for help, and the second, a prayer for resurrection of the person whose bones were contained in the ossuary.

These probably are the oldest records yet found of Christianity. (Carl Henry, ed. *Revelation and the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969, pp. 327,328)

So a critic says Jesus never existed... and that Jesus was never even mentioned in contemporary records? Someone must have served him a bad pizza the night before.

### ***Another testimony***

Before we move on, the following account deserves mention.

From 13 to 50 AD, King Abgar Uchama ruled over the Osrhoene kingdom between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in north west Mesopotamia. Its capital city was Edessa (modern Urfa, in Turkey).

The king was dying of a terrible physical disorder. When he heard continual mention of Jesus and the healings he performed,

Abgar sent by a letter-carrier named Ananias, a humble request to Jesus, begging for relief from his disease.

Eusebius claims to have seen this letter in the archives at Edessa, along with Jesus' reply, and an account of the events that surrounded them. He says he translated them into Greek from the original Syriac. G.A. Williamson, who translated Eusebius from Greek into English, says that he also had a copy of the Syriac text which states that Jesus gave a verbal message to Ananias who wrote it down. (Elva Schroeder, *Whatever Happened to the Twelve Apostles?* Norwood, South Australia: Peacock Publications, 2003, p. 32.)

The note at the bottom of the Syriac report found in the archives at Edessa says: "*All this happened in the year 340.*" Translator G.A. Williamson notes that this was "of the Seleucid era and corresponded to the year AD 30...."

So why do some guys keep parroting the fantasy that Jesus never existed? Are they unaware... or do they have an agenda?

Let's not get into that.

It is sufficient to state that, to the evidence you have just seen, there has been produced no valid rebuttal.

## 2

# Who would be better sources of information?

“I was there. It happened to me,” insisted the white-haired Jewish holocaust survivor. “Don’t tell me that you – sitting over in your Florida mansion – know better.”

“I do know about the holocaust,” responded Bagman. “I’m sure it wasn’t nice.”

“But I heard the shots... saw them fall, heard the screams,” continued Steinberger. He pulled up his sleeve, revealing the prison camp number on his arm.

He was close to the events he described. Didn’t that very fact place him in the best position to know what happened? He was there. It happened to him.

Yes, I hear the critic. In asserting (naively) that first century writers don’t mention Jesus, the critic focuses exclusively on “unbiased”, distant writers. To his mind, Christian sources don’t qualify as evidence.

The critic assumes that witnesses cannot be reliable if they were close to the one about whom they give testimony.

Such an implication is clearly false. Suppose there are first hand eyewitnesses to an event, wouldn’t they be better witnesses than historians removed from the event? What do you think?

In court stands a person who has survived a vicious attack. Isn’t he in the best position to give an accurate report of what happened to him? Or a survivor of a bomb attack in Iraq or Israel - isn’t he more qualified to recall the event? If the New Testament writers happened to be eyewitnesses to Jesus,

wouldn't they be in the best position of anyone to know what happened? ...if they were there ...if the events happened to them? Should the New Testament witnesses be disqualified because they were close to the events they relate?

“Oh, come off it,” I hear the critic shrieking, “those New Testament writers were not witnesses, but only pretended to be. The Gospels are not historical. They do not record Jesus as he really was.”

I'm sorry for the critic, but this is another assumption without proof. Former skeptic Josh McDowell has hit the nail on the head:

Early Christians often paid with their lives or suffered great persecution for their reports that Jesus had lived, died and risen from the dead, and appeared to many after His resurrection.

These early Christians had nothing to gain and everything to lose for their testimony that these things had actually happened. For this reason their accounts are highly significant historical sources. (Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999, p. 126)

I shall ask the critic, then, to explain: Since these early Christians had nothing to gain by their testimony that Jesus was the deliverer from sin and death, who had proved himself by his deeds and teachings, since they had nothing to gain and everything to lose by it, then why were they willing to die for this claim?

Think now. If you are willing to pay with your life for something that you aver is true, might perhaps your testimony have something in it worth taking note of? Should not Christian documents be accorded some historical credence?

### 3

## To whom should the benefit of doubt go?

We possess, then, two types of documents.

1. For starters, we have all those preceding *independent accounts* concerning Jesus. Is anyone going to say that these were all forgeries?

To succeed in his claim that Jesus never existed, the critic will need to prove the total sum of those documents invalid.

Now, we should never be afraid of the truth, wherever it leads. But as a cautious and skeptical person, I can empathise with the skeptic. We are all constantly stumbling upon facts that we never knew of before. And yes, on a number of occasions I have had to face my mistakes. But this calls for honesty. There is nothing wrong with being skeptical, provided one is honest. However, may I state that when the critic who is honestly mistaken hears the truth, he will either quit being mistaken or cease to be honest.

2. The second type of document is the *claimed eyewitness reports of Jesus' acquaintances*.

On the one hand, we see the New Testament writers insisting that their reports are “eyewitness” testimony of Jesus, or written from firsthand information. On the other hand, we see the critic charging that they are not eyewitnesses, but that they’re lying.

Good scholarship will follow Aristotle’s Dictum:

*The benefit of the doubt is to be given to the document itself, not arrogated by the critic to himself.*

Therefore, as Montgomery reminds us, “one must listen to the claims of the document under analysis, and not assume fraud or error unless the author disqualifies himself by contradictions or known factual inaccuracies.” (John W. Montgomery, “Evangelicals and Archaeology.” *Christianity Today*, August 16, 1968)

In other words, it is to be accepted that a document is genuine, unless there is compelling reason to believe otherwise.

So what have we here? An accused and an accuser. Now, do you mind if I ask this: In our country a man is considered innocent till proven guilty, right? So would it be fair to apply this same ruling to the New Testament writers?

No classical scholar would doubt the authenticity of the classical authors. So I invite the critic, now, to answer this: Why treat the New Testament writings differently?

Unless the accuser can prove the professed “eyewitnesses” are phony, isn’t his own integrity on the line if he refuses to accept their testimony?

After all, the same critic will accept the historicity of many other characters from the ancient world on much less evidence than this – often merely upon the single appearance of a name.

So we need to ask again: Was Jesus considered by pagans to be a real historical figure?

Of course, you know the answer to that. The pagans questioned who and what Jesus was, not whether he had really lived. Doubt about the historical reality of Jesus is a modern idea, not an ancient one.

## **PART 2**

**WAS JESUS TURNED  
INTO A 'GOD' LATER?**



## 4

# Was the list of New Testament books decided by Constantine's men?

You've been hearing this for some time now. It's been all over the media. The horrible secret is out: Everyone has just learned that the Holy Bible was "censored" in 325 AD at the Council of Nicaea.

The story goes that Constantine and his bishops in Rome commissioned a new Bible, which omitted those books that spoke of Jesus' *human* traits and inserted those that made him godlike. So was born our New Testament canon, with Jesus, a mere man, now declared to be God. You can hardly turn on a talk show without someone repeating this claim. But is it true?

### ***When was the canon decided?***

If bending history to prove one's theory is good scholarship, then this theory merits a Pulitzer Prize.

You want the truth? Here it is. As early as *150 years before Constantine*, a recognized list of books very close to our New Testament was already in circulation. In *AD 170*, when challenged by the heretical teaching of a man called Marcion, the Church in the West officially defined the extent of the canon (collection of sacred books) in a list, known as the *Muratorian*. (This, by the way, still survives.) It merely published for the sake of clarity, once and for all, a list which it had always believed to be true.

Also Origen (*c. AD 185-254*), in his commentary on the book of Joshua, names all 27 New Testament books.

But even earlier, well before the end of the *first century*, a similar list of recognized New Testament books was affirmed by the Eastern or Syriac churches. Known as the Peshitta Bible, it contained all the books we know today, and in the same order, except for Jude, 2 and 3 John, 2 Peter, and Revelation. The book of Revelation was missing simply because it hadn't been written. And the other books were still being circulated as letters from the apostles.

Of course, in point of time, the Old Testament existed first. Its original text in Hebrew and Aramaic (closely related to Hebrew) had been carefully preserved until the time of Jesus. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, Jewish scribes in different countries would continue to faithfully copy the traditional Old Testament text until printing took over and the Reformation came. This is known as the Masoretic Text.

Then, as the Christian movement spread, the New Testament, revealing Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Messianic expectation, was added to this.

### ***New Testament canon in first century***

From the beginning, these New Testament manuscripts were given the same authority as the Old Testament.

The apostle Paul wrote: *“The scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.”* (1 Timothy 5:18) You will discover that here Luke 10:7 is put on the same level as Deuteronomy 25:4, the New Testament on the same level as the Old Testament.

- In the first century, the “words of... prophecy” were already being read in public worship side by side with the

Old Testament texts. This indicated they had canonical authority in the churches. (Colossians 4:16);

- The apostle Peter declared that Paul’s writings were “Scriptures”. (2 Peter 3:16);
- Luke’s Gospel was recognized and declared by Paul to be “Scripture” as soon as it came off the press, so to speak. (1 Timothy 5:18; see also Luke 10:7);
- Paul used the word *kanon* (“rule”) when referring to the apostles’ fundamental teaching, which was to be followed and obeyed. (Galatians 6:16).

### ***How was the canon decided?***

You might ask, how was the original list of books (the canon) decided? Paul tells us. He says that the church was “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” (Ephesians 2:20)

One of the qualifications of an apostle was that he was an eyewitness of the resurrection of Jesus. (Acts 1:22) Any later claimant was termed a “false apostle”. (2 Corinthians 11:13)

Hence Jesus’ followers recognized as canonical only those books written by eyewitnesses or from firsthand information.

When Paul’s credentials as an apostle were challenged, he responded, “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” (1 Corinthians 9:1) Indeed, he is listed as the last of them to have seen the resurrected Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:6-8)

So in defining the authorized books, here are the questions that were asked:

1. Does a book *agree* with the core books already unanimously accepted as canonical? That is, does it harmonise with the Old Testament, which reveals God as the sovereign Creator and Deliverer? And does it harmonise with the history of Jesus: His birth, death, and resurrection?

2. Is the book from the pens of the earliest apostles and their fellow workers? In other words, is it an historical *witness* of Jesus?

3. Does this book have the same “*ring of truth*” and *mark of divine inspiration* as the others? Such a question was not an attempt to impose a book as “inspired”, so much as to recognize books that had imposed themselves by their intrinsic inspiration into the life of the church. It was understood that God’s Holy Spirit first inspired the writings, then guided in their discerning of what had been inspired. In essence, if the all-knowing and all-powerful God inspired those writings, He also would preserve them. God completes what he begins.

### ***The canon CREATED the movement***

Ask yourself, what was it that created the Christian movement in the first place? Nothing less than the message found in these very same New Testament books. That’s what launched Christianity.

*Constantine’s fourth century* crew did not create the canon. They merely recognized what was already there.

Away back in the *first century*, the same list of books was already known and accepted throughout the Christian world. Those same 27 New Testament books we have today were already established.

Church councils, far from *giving* any authority to the books, rather *bowed* to their authority. And these books already contained clear affirmation of Jesus’ nature as God becoming man.

How can we know the canon of accepted books already existed? Here are five facts that confirm it:

## ***1. Early worldwide textual unity***

The Christians were scattered across vast distances, separated by months of travel. And often forced underground by persecution. Did they have telephones? Of course not. And no faxes... no radio... no Internet.

Yet long before Constantine of Rome, there were apparently many thousands of Greek New Testament manuscripts already copied out. In fact, at least 5,686 surviving Greek New Testament manuscripts have been discovered. These not only contain the same identical books, but the Gospels all show *the same titles*.

German scholar Martin Hengel presents a good case that these titles were appended when the Gospels were first completed and circulated together, at least “between 69 and 100.” (Martin Hengel, “Titles of the Gospels,” *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985, pp. 64-84)

## ***2. Impossible to later change thousands of copies***

Because Christianity was a missionary movement from the beginning (Matthew 28:19-21), its scriptures were immediately translated into the known languages of that period. So, by the second century scores of copies of the New Testament Gospels already existed. And by the fourth century hundreds, if not thousands, of copies.

Now just suppose Constantine, living in the fourth century, wanted to make changes. Can you imagine him trying to call in from the very limits of the Roman Empire every last copy to make those necessary alterations – at that late stage? To keep all manuscripts uniform, every scroll in the world would need to be changed.

Not only that, but numerous copies of the New Testament were in outlying areas *well beyond the reach of* Constantine. We know this because many of these isolated copies have survived. These furnish *an independent means of checking* what was in the earliest list of books, the canon.

The test is when we check the 5,686 or more surviving New Testament Greek manuscripts; we discover they are virtually *identical*. These scattered copies even show the *same titles*.

Only one conclusion makes sense. *That precise grouping of books* had to be assembled more or less at the beginning, *before* Christianity spread out.

### ***3. The faithful made universal changes impossible***

Because of the importance of the New Testament writings to Christians everywhere, nobody could get away with deliberate changes without it being detected.

### ***4. Memorization was another safeguard***

And here's another problem for a would-be corrupter. Scripture memorization was common. Countless memories would have to be changed. Of course, that's impossible. People would know if Constantine's men interfered. The truth would still survive.

### ***5. A mass of quotations from it***

Other *first century* works were quoting from the same canon of books! These, which include *The Epistle of Barnabas*, *The Didache*, Clement's *Corinthians* and Ignatius' *Seven Epistles*, give overwhelming support to the existence of the 27 authoritative books of the New Testament canon.

That's right. Before Constantine's fourth century ever dawned, there were masses of quotations from the New Testament

already published by early Christian leaders. Dean Burgon, one of the greatest Greek scholars of all time, in his research found in all **86,489** quotes of it from early Christian writers - all from ***before Constantine's Council of Nicaea*** in 325 AD. His index of these consists of 16 thick volumes now in the British Museum. (Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1968, pp. 353-354)

So extensive are these quotations that the New Testament ***could virtually be reconstructed*** from them without the use of New Testament manuscripts.

So you could throw the New Testament manuscripts away and still reconstruct it with the simple help of these letters.

Even more compelling is the citation of the New Testament by pagan Greek authors who attacked Christianity, beginning in the latter first century and continuing unabated until about 100 years after the Council of Nicaea. We could cite Celsius, Porphyry and Lucian of Samosata, as examples. These pagans had no reason to endorse the Greek New Testament, yet they repeatedly cite it as having four Gospels, and as teaching a virgin birth, miracles, the atoning of sin by the Crucifixion, and a Resurrection for both Jesus and for His followers.

Of course they ridiculed these teachings they found in the New Testament - thereby furnishing unassailable proof for the existence of these Gospels and their teachings at very early times.

Among the teachings being attacked centuries before the Council of Nicaea was the God-nature of Jesus. The pagans could not believe this possible, considering Jesus' brutal suffering at the Crucifixion.

Porphyry, a pagan critic of the third century, took pains to attack the **FOUR** gospels, citing exactly the same four scriptures that have survived down to our day. Writing half a century before

Nicaea, Porphyry quotes from a New Testament indistinguishable from our own.

This disproves the assertion that our present New Testament collection of books originated in the fourth century with Constantine's men. The truth is, it already existed.

### ***What really happened in fourth century?***

You ask, very well, but what about all the changes in the Bible that we keep hearing were made by that Council? Didn't Nicaea edit books or verses out of the Bible?

Indeed not! The subject never came up at that Council. And today we still have all the Council rulings, in addition to reports by several attendees. These absolutely prove that the Council never issued any such rulings, nor even discussed such ideas as censoring or changing the Bible in any way.

On the contrary, the debate at that Council (known as the Arian debate) was over whether or not to add A SINGLE WORD to the Creed... not the Bible. And that one word was disputed precisely because it was NOT found in the New Testament's vocabulary anywhere.

In other words, everyone agreed on the wording of the New Testament, as well as the Greek version of the Old Testament. The great Nicaean censorship we keep hearing about never happened. The story is a hoax.

In other words, we're being "had" by a modern religious legend - a myth repeated so often it has taken on a life of its own, being repeated in books and articles as if it has some sort of academic "source" somewhere. Yet there's not a word of truth in it.

You can read details on this Council of Nicaea, by a Jewish historian with no pro-Christian bias. (Richard E. Rubenstein, *When Jesus Became God*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1999)

What, then, really happened in the fourth century? What *did* Constantine do?

Constantine was a shrewd politician. He sought to unite the two great factions of his empire – paganism and Christianity. So he looked around for a form of authority that could help unite Christians and pagans.

About a hundred years earlier, a man named Origen had paved the way. Origen was a Gnostic, a Christian heretic who claimed mystical knowledge. Origen wanted to unite Christianity and paganism – just as Constantine did. And to make Christianity more acceptable to pagans, he thought he needed to play down Jesus' divinity (God nature). So he chopped passages out of the Bible, added others in and changed still other passages.

This watered down Bible suited Constantine just fine. He ordered 50 copies of Origen's mutilated Bible to be made - a Bible that frequently omitted the God-nature of Jesus.

One of these 50 copies is believed to be the surviving Vaticanus. From this we can test the critic's assertion: We ask, does it play down Jesus' human traits and make him godlike? Not at all. It agrees essentially with Origen's Gnostic *Hexapla*. It frequently omits the God-nature of Jesus and makes other alterations!

Despite these mutilations, the list of 27 books in Origen's corrupted New Testament agreed with the list in use everywhere else.

So when the critic tells you that Constantine's bishops in Rome inserted books into the Bible to make Jesus more godlike, gently ask him for his stockpile of evidence!

Yes, Constantine *did* create a compromise religion in his part of the world. But no, he *did not* rewrite the New Testament.

## 5

# How early or late was Jesus worshipped as God?

Go with the evidence. That's always the safe procedure. So we'll continue to apply that rule.

*It is claimed:* Tales about Jesus' words and life were added to gradually, until a myth developed that Jesus was God before his birth into the human race. Then, in the fourth century, Constantine and his bishops made Jesus equal with God.

*In reality:* Once more, I searched for evidence by critics to support this claim. Alas, there was none. Again, this claim is made without a shred of proof. The *earliest* Christians definitely believed Jesus to be God. This was not an idea that developed over time.

If you would like proof of how early Christians understood Jesus, just turn to Paul's letters. Even critics will admit that all Paul's letters in the New Testament were completed before AD 65. And let's face it. That's early.

So did the early Christians consider Jesus to be no more than just a good man, as the critic wants us to believe? Just see for yourself:

\* Paul's book of Philippians (AD 61) contains the message that Jesus is God. "Being *in the form of God*, [he]... made himself of no reputation, ... and was made in the likeness of men." (Philippians 2:5-11)

\* Paul's first book of Timothy (AD 58) states concerning Jesus that uniquely "*God* was manifest in the flesh." (1 Timothy 3:16)

\* Paul's book of Romans (AD 56-57) states clearly that "concerning the flesh *Christ* came, *who is* over all, *God* blessed for ever." (Romans 9:5)

\* In his book of Colossians (c. AD 63), Paul writes that Jesus "is *the image of the invisible God*...[and] by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible... and by him all things consist." (Colossians 1:15-17) "For *in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*." (ch. 2:9)

\* In the book of Hebrews (AD 62-65), Paul says that "God... hath... spoken unto us by his Son,... by whom he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high... But *unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever*." (Hebrews 1:1-3,8)

All of this was written, accepted and believed by Jesus' followers no later than **AD 65!**

You will find this same understanding that Jesus is God, in the Gospels, too.

In any case, not only does Paul speak of Jesus as God as early as AD 58, Paul's book of 1 Corinthians, also reports Jesus' death and resurrection. (1 Corinthians 15:1-6) And this was written by about **AD 55** - only 24 years after the alleged events.

Internal evidence for this early date is strong: 1- The book repeatedly claims to be written by Paul (1:1, 12-17; 3:4, 6, 22; 16:21). 2- It reveals parallels with the book of Acts (**60 to 62 AD**). 3- From beginning to end there is a ring of authenticity to the book. 4- Paul mentions **500** who had seen Jesus, *most* of whom were *still alive* when he wrote. (15:6) 5- The contents harmonize with what has been learned about Corinth during that early era.

Not just 1 Corinthians, but also two other of Paul's writings, 2 Corinthians and Galatians are likewise well attested and early. Some of Paul's letters are dated as early as **AD 48**.

And his understanding that *Jesus is God* does not evolve through his various writings. It was settled in his mind before he began his letters.

This points to the godhead of Jesus being recognised *in the first century* – hundreds of years *before* Constantine's Council of Nicaea in 325 AD.

So Jesus as God is a fourth century invention? What you are seeing is the critic's arbitrary opinion – another example of unsubstantiated, wilful conjecture.

***Will the critic please answer this?***

Here is my question for the critic. Is he a scholar and doesn't know that *most of the Christian world*, scattered from Syria to Japan (and some other groups in the West), were *not under the influence of Constantine's fourth century Rome*?

And from their earliest history, these majority of independent Christians held that *Jesus was coequal with God*? And they had this in their Bibles in their own languages from the earliest times. (See Chapter 4.)

How, then, can the critic pretend that Jesus as God was a fourth century Roman invention? He assumes this without proof.

Even a non-Christian writer about **AD 112** testifies that early Christians believed in Jesus as God:

Pliny the Younger was a Roman author and administrator. In a letter to the emperor Trajan, Pliny describes the early Christian worship practices:

They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to do any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food – but food of an ordinary and innocent kind. (Pliny the Younger, *Letters*. 10:96. Trans. By W. Melmoth)

Here is solid evidence that Jesus Christ was *worshipped as God* by Christians *from an early date*, following the practice described in Acts 2:42 and 46.

Celsus, a pagan critic of the *second century*, wrote:

The assertion that some God or Son of God has come down to the earth as Judge of mankind is most shameful... Is it that God wants to give us knowledge of himself for our own salvation in order that those who accept it may become good and be saved...?

Another testimony comes from Lucian of Samosata, a *second century* Greek writer whose works contain sarcastic critiques of Christianity:

The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day – the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account... You see, these misguided creatures... deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. (Lucian of Samosata, “Death of Pelegrine, 11-13.” In *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, 4 vols. Trans. By H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1949)



## **PART 3**

**NEW TESTAMENT: WRITTEN  
BY EYEWITNESSES OR NOT?**



## 6

# How early were the New Testament books written?

Sometimes my wife has asked me to fetch something from the pantry. A cursory glance around and I might reply, “It’s not there.” She will come in, go to the pantry... and there it is. One should be careful before making sweeping statements.

***The critic claims:*** The New Testament books were written decades (some even up to a century) after the time that Jesus purportedly lived – by men who craftily inserted later myths that had developed about Jesus. And those writers palmed off their pseudo reports as the work of Jesus’ original disciples. **They are not contemporary eyewitness accounts.**

Mark was the first New Testament Gospel - probably not created until 70 to 80 AD. Matthew and Luke even later, during 80 to 100 AD, and John not until the first half of the second century. (Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus*. San Francisco: Harper, 1996, pp. 38,256)

***In reality:*** As my investigation progressed, I was beginning to feel sorry for the critic. He was imposing late dates, not from evidence, but out of his head, to support his theory. It was becoming painfully obvious that he had failed to adequately search. Had he done so, he would have discovered that imposing late dates goes against manuscript evidence.

In this chapter, for easy comparison, our benchmark date is the crucifixion of Jesus in Jerusalem at the time of the Jewish Passover festival on Nisan 14, that is, April 27, **AD 31**. (For evidence of this see Jonathan Gray, *Stolen Identity*, chapters 23-24. <<http://www.beforeus.com/stolen-id.php>>)

We shall now discover that the New Testament books were *not* written down up to a century after the events they described, but during the lifetimes of those who were involved in the events. Its writers wrote as eyewitnesses or from firsthand information.

For this reason, the New Testament must be regarded as a competent primary source document from the first century.

The evidence will show the New Testament books to have been written much earlier than the critic claims: *Matthew* 37 AD; *Mark* as early as 45 AD; *Paul's* letters 48-65; *Luke's* Gospel before the early 60s; *Luke's* book of Acts by 62 AD; and *John* before 70.

Let's start with observations by some erstwhile critics. Did you know that many liberal scholars are being forced to consider earlier dates for the New Testament?

William Fox Albright was one the world's foremost Middle East archaeologists. First, let's note his testimony:

We can already say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after about A.D. 80, two full generations before the date between 130 and 150 given by the more radical New Testament critics of today. (William F. Albright, *Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1955, p.136)

Later, with more evidence in, this former liberal scholar said:

In my opinion, every book of the New Testament was written by a baptized Jew between the forties and eighties of the first century (very probably sometime between about A.D. 50 and 75). (*Towards a More Conservative View*, p.3; also in an interview for *Christianity Today*, 18 January, 1963)

Dr. John A. T. Robinson was known for his role in launching the ‘Death of God’ movement. However, his later research convinced him that the whole of the New Testament was written before the Fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. (John A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*. London: SCM Press, 1976)

## PAUL’S BOOKS

Among the earliest New Testament writings are Paul’s. Of course, no recognized scholars and historians dispute that *Paul* was a real person, a historical figure, who *lived at the same time as Jesus*.

This convinced rabbi knew the early Christians well enough to attempt their extinction. In the late thirties, he converted to Christianity. He became a leading Christian apostle to the non-Jews, and eventually he was executed for his faith by Nero in *AD 67*.

*These facts* are historically *accepted by foes and friends* alike.

So if you want to know what the earliest disciples of Jesus *really* believed, Paul is *the most historically dependable authority to consult*. What is more, Paul’s writings comprise the backbone of the New Testament.

Time-wise, his life and work *overlaps the very beginnings of the Christian movement*. That Paul wrote from around *AD 48 to AD 60*, no recognized historians and scholars will deny. Paul’s dates are so well established that few modern scholars even bother to mention the fact.

For example, one of the most radical scholars, Hendrikus Boers of Emory University, states casually that Paul’s argument in 1 Thessalonians is “fully in line with other examples of inter-Jewish polemic *in the forties* of the first century A.D.” (See George

Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography: Towards a New Understanding*. Atlanta, GA.: Scholars Press, 1985, p. 203. Emphasis added.)

Both critical and conservative scholars widely accept that Paul's book known as 1 Corinthians was written by no later than **AD 55 or 56**. This is a bare quarter century after the crucifixion in **AD 31**.

Professor Kevan concurs. He says:

[Paul's] epistles constitute historical evidence of the highest kind. The letters addressed to the *Galatians*, the *Corinthians*, and the *Romans*, about the authenticity and date of which there is very little dispute, belong to the time of Paul's missionary journeys, and may be dated in the period **A.D. 55-58**. This brings the evidence of the resurrection of Christ still nearer to the event: the interval is the short span of twenty-five years. Since Paul himself makes it plain that the subject of his letter was the same as that about which he had spoken to them when he was with them, this really brings back the evidence to a still earlier time. (Ernest F. Kevan, *The Resurrection of Christ*. London: The Campbell Morgan Memorial Bible Lectureship, Westminster Chapel, Buckingham Gate, S.W.I., June 14, 1961, p. 6. Emphasis added.)

### ***Paul agrees with the Gospels***

It is important to understand that all three books include facts that agree with the Gospels. For example:

- Paul refers to Jesus' virgin birth (Galatians 4:4), sinless life (2 Corinthians 5:21), death on the cross (1 Corinthians 15:3; Galatians 3:13); resurrection on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:4), and post-resurrection appearances (1 Corinthians 15:5-8).
- Paul speaks of the hundreds of eyewitnesses who could verify the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:6).

- Paul rests the truth of Christianity on the historicity of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12-19).
- Paul also gives historical details about Jesus' contemporaries, the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:5-8), including his private encounters with Peter and the apostles (Galatians 1:18-2:14).

## **BOOK OF ACTS**

Paul's best friend was a man called *Luke*. Paul said of him, '*only Luke* is with me.' Luke wrote the book of Acts and the Gospel of Luke. Logically, if Paul is credible, one should at least give Luke a fair hearing.

### ***Critic forced to change his mind***

Sir William Ramsay is reputed to be one of the greatest archaeologists of all time.

As a student in the German historical school of the mid-nineteenth century, Ramsay was firmly convinced that the New Testament book of Acts was a fraudulent product of the mid-second century AD.

In his research to make a topographical study of Asia Minor, he was compelled to consider the New Testament writings of Luke. Here is how he relates his experience:

I began with a mind unfavourable to it... but more recently I found myself brought into contact with the Book of Acts as an authority for the topography, antiquities and society of Asia Minor. It was gradually borne upon me that in various details the narrative showed marvellous truth. In fact, beginning with a fixed idea that the work was essentially a second century composition, and never relying on its evidence as trustworthy for first century conditions, I gradually came to find it a useful ally in some

obscure and difficult investigations. (Edward Musgrave Blaiklock, *Layman's Answer: An Examination of the New Theology*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968, p. 36 – quoted from Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*)

As a result of that, Ramsey was forced to do a complete reversal of his beliefs. He concluded after thirty years of study that “Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy... this author should be placed along with the greatest of historians.” (Sir W. M. Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915, p. 222)

In fact, Ramsay concluded that “Luke’s history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness.” (W. M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962, p. 81)

Since then, further discoveries have shown New Testament writers such as Luke to be careful historians. His reliability shines through details so intricately yet often unintentionally woven into the narrative. His familiarity with particular locations with details suitable only to the times in question stamps Luke as a trustworthy contemporary of the events reported.

Here also is the verdict of Roman historian A.N. Sherwin-White:

For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming.... Any attempt to reject its basic historicity must now appear absurd. Roman historians have taken it for granted. (A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, reprint edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978, p. 189)

Let me give you an example of how Luke writes: He informs us concerning the time that John the Baptist commenced his ministry, that it was “In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and

Herod being tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanius the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests...” (Luke 3:1,2)

Notice how historically precise is Luke. He takes pains to confirm the date by *six independent lines of evidence*.

F. F. Bruce, of the University of Manchester, offers this tribute to the historical accuracy of Luke:

A man whose accuracy can be demonstrated in matters where we are able to test it is likely to be accurate even where the means for testing him are not available. Accuracy is a habit of mind, and we know from happy (or unhappy) experience that some people are habitually accurate just as others can be depended upon to be inaccurate. Luke’s record entitles him to be regarded as a writer of habitual accuracy. (F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents. Are They Reliable?* London: Inter Varsity Press, 1974, p. 90. Emphasis supplied)

Clark Pinnock, Professor of Interpretations at McMasters University, Toronto, concurs:

There exists no document from the ancient world witnessed by so excellent a set of textual and historical testimonies, and offering so superb an array of historical data on which the intelligent decision may be made. An honest (person) cannot dismiss a source of this kind. (McDowell, Josh *The Resurrection Factor*. San Bernadino Ca: Here’s Life Publishers, Inc., 1981, p. .9)

There is powerful evidence that the book of Acts was written no later than the *early 60s*. In fact, noted historian Colin Hemer produces evidence that Luke wrote Acts *by AD 62*. (Colin Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenic History*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990)

You ask how did he work that out? For one thing, the book of Acts does *not* mention several monumental events that would certainly have been included, had Acts been written *after* they occurred.

And what events were these?

1. In Acts, the crucial event of the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 is not mentioned.
2. There is no hint of the outbreak of the AD 66 Jewish War nor of the serious deterioration of the relations between the Jews and Romans before that time.
3. Neither is there any hint of the deterioration of Christian relations with Rome during the Nero's persecution of the late 60s.
4. The prominence and authority of the Sadducees as described in the book of Acts reflects a pre- AD 70 date, before the collapse of their political cooperation with Rome.
5. Luke paints non-significant details of the culture of an early, Julio-Claudian period.
6. But more telling is this: The areas of controversy described in the book of Acts presume that the temple was still standing. The book deals with issues that were especially important prior to AD 70, but not later.
7. In the book of Acts, the *Jerusalem Temple* plays a central role in the nation of Israel. Luke writes as if the Temple is still an important part of Jewish life.
8. The destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple - and the burning of Rome and the subsequent persecution of Christians - would have had an enormous impact on the young Christian community – yet neither of these pivotal events is mentioned in the book of Acts – nor in any of the New Testament writings.
9. The action in the book of Acts ends with events *very early in the 60s*, yet the description in Acts 27 and 28 is written with a vivid immediacy. It is also an odd place to end the

book if years have passed since the pre-62 events occurred.

10. The book of Acts *ends* on a strange note - Paul living under *house arrest*. Isn't it strange that Luke does not record the deaths of his two chief characters, Peter and Paul? What would you say was the most plausible reason for this? Isn't it logical that Peter and Paul were still alive when the book of Acts was written? And you would be right.
11. Now, about *the murdering* of the Christian leaders. There is no mention of such an important event as the death of James at the hands of the Sanhedrin around **AD 61**, which is recorded by Josephus in *Antiquities of the Jews* (20.9.1.200). Nor the murder of both Paul and Peter in **AD 67**. Surely their deaths were momentous events for the early Christian community.

Significantly, we find *none of these deaths referred to* in ANY of the 27 canonized books of the New Testament. And as for Acts, it's the most comprehensive historical record we have of the early Christian movement.

There can be but one explanation - that these records were all written *prior to* these events – most likely *before 61 AD*.

Now shall we consider the four Gospels? How old are they?

That erstwhile liberal scholar Dr John Robinson places Matthew at **AD 40 to after 60**; Mark at about **45 to 60**; Luke at before **57 to after 60**; and John at from **40 to after 65**. (John A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*. London: SCM Press, 1976)

So there exists a strong case that all the New Testament Gospels were written as early as between **AD 40 and the early 60s**. This would place the first written records *as close as nine years* after Jesus' crucifixion!

It would mean that they were all composed within the lifetimes of eyewitnesses and contemporaries of the events. Assuming the

basic integrity and reasonable accuracy of the writers, this should place the reliability of the New Testament beyond reasonable doubt, wouldn't you say?

## GOSPEL OF JOHN

Certainly *John's Gospel* (the **LAST** of the four) was written *prior to AD 70*. Internal evidence supports this. For example, John states: '*Now there IS in Jerusalem... a pool... called Bethesda.*' This landmark, along with others mentioned by John *as still existing*, would most likely have been destroyed by the Roman armies under Titus in AD 70.

And the other Gospels?

Much the same. The Gospels of Luke, Mark and Matthew *prophesied the fall of the Jerusalem Temple* which occurred in AD 70. But not the fulfillment. Isn't this very strange - that they all predict this major event *but do not record it happening*? Why do they not mention such an important milestone?

Simply because that event had *not yet happened* when they wrote.

## GOSPEL OF LUKE

Luke's Gospel was written by the same author as the book of Acts. The style and vocabulary of the two books betray a common author.

The book of Acts (**AD 62**) is the *second* of a two-part work authored by Luke, so this means his *Gospel of Luke* was written first - before Acts (cf. Luke 1:1 and Acts 1:1) – and less than thirty years from the death of Jesus. These books are contemporary to persons who witnessed Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Which is just what Luke claims in the prologue to his Gospel:

Many have undertaken to draw up a record of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they

were handed down to us by those who were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4)

The Gospel of Luke *prophesied the fall of the Jerusalem Temple* which occurred in AD 70. But not the fulfillment. Isn't this very strange - that it predicts this major event *but does not record it happening*? Why does it not mention such an important milestone?

Simply because that event had *not yet happened* when Luke wrote.

And since Luke presents the same information about who Jesus is, what he taught, and his death and resurrection as do the other Gospels, is there any reason to reject their historical accuracy?

Now listen. *Paul* (writing between AD 48 and AD 60) *quotes from Luke's Gospel*. (Paul's 1 Timothy 5:18 quotes Luke 10:7). Again, this shows us that Luke's Gospel was completed in Paul's lifetime. (Note well: Paul was dead by AD 67.)

## **GOSPEL OF MARK**

As we saw earlier, the critic claims that Mark (which he erroneously calls the first Gospel) was “probably not created until 70 to 80 AD.” (Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus*. San Francisco: Harper, 1996, p. 38)

Now, just think this through carefully.

1. Critics generally do not dispute that Peter was executed for his faith in **AD 67**.
2. Papias (c. 70 – 155 AD), a direct disciple of the apostle John, who was himself later martyred at Pergamum, relates that when

Peter heard about Mark's Gospel, he was delighted and authorised it to be read in all the church groups.

3. Unless Peter did this posthumously (smile), then Mark's Gospel was in circulation *before* AD 67.

Or to arrive at the truth by another route:

1. Critics do not dispute that Paul was executed by Nero in *AD 67*.
2. However, since Paul (writing *between AD 48 and AD 60*) quotes from Luke's Gospel (see above, under Luke), Luke must have been written before *AD 60*.
3. Furthermore, since Luke drew some of his information from the *Gospel of Mark*, it makes sense that Mark was even *earlier*.

Like Luke, the Gospel of Mark *prophesied the fall of the Jerusalem Temple* which occurred in AD 70... but not the fulfillment. Isn't this very strange - that Mark also predicts this major event *but does not record it happening*? Why does he not mention such an important milestone?

Simply because that event had *not yet happened* when he wrote.

It has now been discovered that the Dead Sea Essenes possessed a copy of Mark's Gospel as early as *AD 50*. (We shall elaborate on this in Chapter 8.) This is only possible if it was already in circulation before this time.

In corroboration of this, early writers inform us that after completing his Gospel, Mark paid a visit to Cyrene, his original home town, a Greek city in what is today Libya, *taking a copy of his Gospel with him*. After spending some time there sharing his faith and helping the local people there, Mark then left to take the message of Jesus to Egypt. (Eusebius, Atiya and other writers)

According to the *History of the Patriarchs*, this was in response to a revelation received by both Peter and Mark that Mark should take the gospel to Alexandria. Mark arrived in Egypt in

the 15<sup>th</sup> year after the ascension of Jesus, or **AD 45**. (Aziz S. Antiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1968, pp. 225-228; William Steuart McBirnie, *The search for the Twelve Apostles*, pp. 252-257; F.J. Foakes Jackson, *The History of the Christian Church From the Earliest Times to AD 461*. Cambridge: J. Hall & Son, 1914, pp. 42,271; Eusebius, *Annianus*, pp. 89-91,103,124; *Jerome and Gennadius, Bethlehem AD 492*. transl. by Ernest Cushing Richardson. Oxford: James Parker & Co., 1892, p. 364; John Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark & Luke*. Sevenoaks, Kent: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., pp. 174-175; Matthew Henry & Thomas Scott, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*. 3 vols., written 1710 and 1792. Nashville, TE.: Royal Publishers Inc., 1979, p. 162; *Merril F. Unger's Bible Dictionary*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1974, p. 695)

The point to note is that *before* Mark went to Cyrene, then in **AD 45** to Egypt, he had already written his Gospel.

That Mark had access to firsthand information about the closing week before the crucifixion is obvious from the minuteness, the almost startling sharpness and fidelity of his detail. No one but a writer in close touch with the facts could have given us that unforgettable moonlight picture of the Garden of Gethsemane. There are also touches in his description of the women's startling visit to the tomb early in the morning that suggest a similar authentic source.

## **GOSPEL OF MATTHEW**

Robert Funk's Jesus Seminar theorises that (a) "the Gospel of Mark, was not created until... the decade of 70-80 C.E." and (b) that "Matthew and Luke employed an early copy of Mark as the narrative framework for their gospels, which were composed in the next two decades [i.e. AD 80-100]." (Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus*. San Francisco: Harper, 1996, p. 38)

We shall find, however, that not only was Matthew written first, but that it was written early... very early.

For starters, when Matthew gives his report, the important AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple has not yet occurred. *This milestone event is still future.*

However, both Matthew and Luke do mention Jesus' prediction of this event: "*WHEN ye shall see Jerusalem compassed [surrounded] with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.*" The advice was to flee quickly. (Luke 21:20-24. cf. Matthew 24:15-19)

In the autumn of AD 66, Cestius Gallus, Roman legate of Syria, marched against Jerusalem to put down a rebellion. His troops surrounded the city, then withdrew for a brief period.

THE CHRISTIANS SAW THIS AS THE SIGNAL JESUS HAD PREDICTED. As the Zealots opened the gates and set out in pursuit of the retiring Romans, the believers knew THEIR MOMENT HAD COME. Latching on to Jesus' warning of 35 years earlier, every Christian fled out through the open gates at the proper time.

They fled to Pella, on the other side of the Jordan Valley, and thereby escaped the destruction of Jerusalem, in which more than a million died.

Even *Encyclopedia Judaica* acknowledges that "Prior to Jerusalem's siege by Titus (in 70 CE), its Christian community fled to Pella."

Think carefully now, was this just coincidence? You have the population of Judea expecting Jerusalem to be a safe place from the Romans, so from all over the countryside they are pouring *into* it, yet on the other hand the Christians are fleeing *out* of the city - so not one of them perishes? How did those Christians know?

And again, does Matthew report this triumphant escape made by the Christians? Or that national calamity, the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem? No. *These events are still considered to be future.*

There's no escaping the fact, Matthew bears the characteristics of that pre-70 AD period and not later.

### ***Independent histories confirm***

Independent clues to the dating of Matthew's Gospel come from three surprise sources. The long standing Christian communities of both Armenia (in modern day Turkey) and India each kept its own record of events, as did the city of Salamis in Cyprus.

#### ***Turkey – Matthew's Gospel AD 44***

The Armenians of Turkey kept a record of the apostles Jude Thaddaeus and Bartholomew having brought the Gospel to Armenia. (M.C. Gabrielian, Armenia, *A Martyr Nation*, 1918) Bartholomew apparently obtained one or two copies of Matthew's Gospel in Hebrew or Aramaic. Either he or Thaddaeus took a copy of Matthew to Edessa (now called Urfa, in modern Turkey) in **AD 44**. Bartholomew remained there spreading the news of Jesus for ten years. Jerome reports that the church there still had an original copy of ***Matthew's Gospel*** in Hebrew three centuries later. Note the date recorded: **AD 44**.

#### ***India – Matthew's Gospel AD 54***

From here, in **AD 54**, Bartholomew continued on along the old trade route from Mashad to Bactria, through the Khyber Pass and on to India. He eventually reached a Jewish colony on the eastern side of the Ganges River. Many of these became followers of Jesus. Bartholomew left with them one of his precious copies of ***Matthew's Gospel*** in Aramaic. (William Carey, *An Enquiry*)

In 180, Demetrius, a Christian church leader in Egypt, sent Pantaenus, one of his leading teachers, to India. Arriving in India, Pantaenus discovered descendants of Bartholomew's original converts who were still faithfully following Jesus. They showed him the ***Gospel of Matthew*** in Hebrew characters which Bartholomew had left with them before his departure by ship in **AD 59**. On his return to Egypt, Pantaenus brought this Gospel back with him. Note the date recorded: **AD 59**.

## ***Cyprus – Matthew’s Gospel AD 58***

Another confirmation of the early dating of Matthew comes from the history of Barnabas. From AD 50 to 58, Mark and Barnabas worked out of Barnabas’ home town Salamis, on the island of Cyprus.

However, Elymas Bar Jesus, a Jewish astrologer, roused the Jews of Salamis against Barnabas. They rushed him to the hippodrome, where he was brutally stoned to death.

That night Mark secretly took the body of his cousin and buried it outside the city, under a carob tree, in an empty Roman tomb hewn from the rocky hillside. He folded Barnabas’ hands across his breast over a copy of *Matthew’s Gospel* in Barnabas’ own handwriting.

Barnabas is said to have died on June 11, **AD 58**, at around 60 years of age. A small chapel was later built over his tomb. It can be seen in Salamis today.

### ***First written in Aramaic***

Among the 3,000 new Jewish converts to Jesus on the Day of Pentecost in **AD 31**, were representatives from at least 15 different nations. These new believers needed something in written form to take back home with them. There would certainly have been scribes among so large a number to help with this task.

Papias (c 70 – 155 AD), a direct disciple of the apostle John, who was later martyred at Pergamum, tells us that to meet this need, “***Matthew compiled*** the Sayings of the Lord in Aramaic and everyone translated them as well as he could.” (Acts 2:8-11; 6:7; *A New Eusebius*, ed. By J. Stevenson. London: SPCK, 1983, p. 152; C.F. Hunter, *The New Testament, Its Writers and Their Message*. London: J.W. Butcher, 1923, pp. 25-27,33,34, 38; *Encyclopaedia Britannica Micro* Vol VI, 1974, p. 697; Carsten Peter Thiede, *Jesus – Life or Legend*. Oxford: Lion, 1990, pp. 80, 144,150)

Ancient testimony is that *Matthew's was the first Gospel*.

We have noted that Mark's Gospel was written as early as **AD 45**. This being so, then Matthew's Aramaic Gospel (being the first) must have been written *earlier than* that date.

### ***As close as 6 years after Jesus***

It is considered that Matthew's *original complete Gospel* (considering that he probably first wrote it in Aramaic) was penned as early as **37 AD**. That is the traditional date. At the very latest, it would be **45 AD**, before he left the Aramaic-speaking Jews to go to Ethiopia.

Written in Hebrew (or Aramaic), it was directed primarily at Jewish converts. His phrase "to this day", used twice, would seem to indicate that he was writing his report not many years removed from the event.

Details of Jesus' birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection were the basis of his Gospel. His chief aim was to show the Jews how completely Jesus had fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. Hence the constantly recurring phrase "that it might be fulfilled" used many times in Matthew's Gospel.

This Gospel answers to the first, or Jewish period of the Christian movement, which ended about AD 41.

*Its Hebraisms* suit the earliest period of Christianity. As a matter of fact, although the date Matthew wrote his Gospel has been much discussed, no convincing reason has been offered for discrediting the traditional date of **37 AD**. That's only 6 years after the key events!

The reasons for *accepting* this information are far more compelling than the reasons against.

This Hebrew edition of Matthew was used by the Jewish and Syrian church for many years. Bartholomew took it to India, and Epiphanius and Jerome report that it was still being used in some localities up to the fifth century.

Early Christian chroniclers write that Matthew worked from Jerusalem for the first 15 years of the fledgling Christian movement, until AD 45, with trips to Macedonia, Syria, Persia and Parthia. His Gospel in Aramaic belongs to this period. And doubtless his Greek version followed within a few years at the most.

This would place the Greek Matthew close to mid-first century. Unger states that “Seventeen independent witnesses of the first four centuries attest its genuineness.” (Merril F. Unger, *Archaeology and the New Testament*. Zondervan, 1980)

Fausset writes:

The apostle John sanctioned the gospel of Matthew as authentic. The Hebraisms suit the earliest period of the church. Early Christian writers quote the Greek not the Hebrew version with implicit confidence in its authority as Matthew’s work.

Our Greek Matthew has few, if any traces of being a translation, it has the general marks of being an independent work.” (A. R. Fausset, *Bible Dictionary and Encyclopaedia*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing House)

In other words, Matthew himself wrote not only the Hebrew, but also the Greek Gospel bearing his name.

After that, he went to share the news of Jesus in Ethiopia. He was murdered there in Napata on September 21, AD 68.

### ***Why critics want later dates***

Do you want to know why critics are *forced* to date the Gospels later? It's because their *anti-supernatural bias* forces them into a corner... They don't want to admit that the fall of Jerusalem (AD 70) could be accurately predicted by Jesus 40 years before it occurred. *It's a philosophical objection, not one based on the evidence.*

Also, by positing and accepting late dates, they hope to create enough time between the events and recording for eyewitnesses to die off and a myth to develop around the founder of Christianity.

### ***Later church issues unknown by Gospel writers***

Another fascinating pointer to the early timing of the Gospels is the *absence of 'church' concerns* or propaganda.

If the early Christians cooked up the contents of the Gospels, we would expect them to have put into the mouth of Jesus matters which were of burning concern to themselves, at the time they wrote.

For example, by the time Paul wrote his books, circumcision had become such a *contentious issue* in the early Church. Yet it *never gets a mention* in the Gospels. A telling reason for us to conclude that those Gospels were written *before* this circumcision issue emerged.

It's evident that the New Testament writers preserved history honestly, without injecting into it any personal bias.

## 7

# Is it quoted by any first century writers?

The judge asked the attorney, “Why is the witness not here?”

“Well, Your Honor, there are several reasons. Firstly, the witness died suddenly this week. Secondly...”

“Hold it!” said the judge. “That’s adequate. The other reasons are not needed.”

We are in a similar situation. The previous chapter – being firm fact – should be sufficient for any honest, thinking person. However, I would like to demonstrate that we are faced with an embarrassment of evidence... probably more than we need. So let’s be bold and generous.

As a cross check to the early dating of Gospels we have other *first century* works quoting from them! Among these are *The Epistle of Barnabas*, *The Didache*, *Clement’s Corinthians* and *Ignatius’ Seven Epistles*.

These quotations are so numerous and widespread that if no manuscripts of the New Testament had survived, the New Testament could be reproduced from the writings of the early fathers alone. (J. Harold Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977, p.54)

Sir David Dalrymple asked himself the question, “Suppose that the New Testament had been destroyed, and every copy of it lost by the end of the third century, could it have been collected together again from the writing of the Fathers of the second and third centuries?”

His answer? "...as I possessed all the existing works of the Fathers of the second and third centuries, I commenced to search, and *up to this time I have found the entire New Testament, except eleven verses.*" (Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. San Bernardino, CA.: Here's Life Publishers, 1986, pp. 50-51)

These early writers include:

\* **Clement** (AD 30 to 95), the second Bishop of the early church in Rome, who intimately knew the apostles Paul and Peter, and others of the original apostles. (George F. Jowett, *The Drama of the Lost Disciples*. London: Covenant Publishing Co. Ltd., 1996, pp. 169-170, 196,222; Origen, *De Principis*, Book II, Ch. 3; Tertullian, *Against Heresies*, Ch. 23; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book III, Ch. 3)

\* **Ignatius** (AD 70-110), Bishop of Antioch, who was martyred. He knew all the apostles and was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the apostle John. He quotes from Matthew, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, James and Peter.

\* **Polycarp** (born AD 70), martyred at 86 years of age, was Bishop of Smyrna and a direct disciple of the apostle John.

\* **Barnabas** (c. AD 70) and **Hermas** (c. AD 95).

And there are numerous others, between AD 100 and the time of the Council of Nicaea (325). Among these very early works are those of Irenaeus of Lyons. Irenaeus was martyred around 180 AD. He was a student of Polycarp, the long-lived disciple of the apostle John himself. Extant quotes of Irenaeus' writings include quotes from every New Testament book but Philemon.

Again, the benefit of the evidence is to be given to the writer, not to the critic born 2,000 years later.

Every attesting early church father from the first, second and third centuries who quotes the New Testament, can be perceived to be a dated manuscript, and an independent authority. And the combined evidence of several of these becomes simply unchallengeable.

## 8

# What are the oldest surviving copies?

*The critic claims:* No New Testament fragments are older than about 125 AD. (*Funk*, p. 25)

*In reality:* Sorry to be a spoil sport, but there are at least two known New Testament manuscript fragments predating AD 125. These are 7Q5 (from the Gospel of Mark – before 50 AD) and the Magdalen manuscript (from the Gospel of Matthew – 66 AD).

There are valid factors that help determine the age of a manuscript. These include (a) materials used; (b) letter size and form; (c) punctuation; (d) text divisions; (e) ornamentation; (f) the color of the ink; (g) ; (h) the texture and color of parchment, to mention a few. (Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986, pp. 242-246)

### **7Q5 – from Gospel of Mark**

Jose O’Callahan, a Spanish paleographer, announced in 1972 that he had translated a piece of the Gospel of Mark on a fragment of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Fragments from this same cave 7 had previously been dated between BC 50 and AD 50.

Eventually O’Callahan identified nine fragments. Using the accepted methods of papyrology and palaeography, O’Callahan compared sequences of letters with existing documents and eventually identified nine fragments - a fragment of the Gospel of Mark (fragment 7Q5), which he dated to have been written in **AD 50**, and fragments of Acts and other epistles dated to have

been written slightly after **AD 50**. (Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2002, p. 530)

These were identified thus, as “7Q5”, and so on – fragment “7Q5” indicating fragment 5 from Qumran cave 7.

*Time* magazine quoted one scholar who claimed that, if O’Callahan’s identification was correct, “they can make a bonfire of 70 tons of indigestible German scholarship” (David Estrada and William White, Jr., *The First New Testament*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1978, p. 136)

For the Essenes to have possessed a copy of Mark’s Gospel about Jesus at so early a date, it must have already been in circulation prior to their obtaining that copy. (Elva Schroeder, *Whatever Happened to the Twelve Apostles?* Norwood, South Australia: Peacock Publications, 2003, p. 125; Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew d’Ancona, *The Jesus Papyrus*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1996))

It was also a strong tradition that Mark took the news of Jesus’ death and resurrection to Alexandria within 15 years after the event, in **46 AD**. (*Ibid.*) If this be so, it would appear quite reasonable for Mark to have written his report as early as **45 AD** - while eyewitnesses to that event were still alive!

As one would expect, critics have objected to O’Callahan’s identification and have tried to find other possibilities. They blame everything from bad analysis to outright fraud. They object that the fragmentary nature of the manuscripts makes it difficult to be dogmatic about identifications. Instead of weighing the evidence, the critic simply plays philosophical games. There is so much at stake. No wonder skeptics fear this being the real thing.

Yet O’Callahan offers a plausible, albeit revolutionary, possibility. And the truth is, the evidence in favour of these dates far outweighs the strongest argument against.

If the identification of even one of these fragments as New Testament is valid, it would be shown that Mark’s Gospel was

written within the life time of the apostles and contemporaries of the events.

A date before AD 50 leaves no time for mythological embellishment of the records. They would have to be accepted as historical.

And, since these manuscripts are not originals but copies, it would confirm that the New Testament was “published” – that is, copied and disseminated - during the life time of the writers.

Not only that, it would show that the New Testament canon already existed during this early period, with pieces representing every major section of the New Testament: Gospels, Acts, and both Pauline and General Epistles.

However, even without this Dead Sea manuscript from Mark, *the cumulative evidence* still places the New Testament within the first century, and during the lives of eyewitnesses.

### ***Magdalen manuscript – Gospel of Matthew***

I am not certain but I would guess that the Jesus Seminar guys were mighty browned off at the front page news in *The Times* of London on December 24, 1994. It was that the oldest remains of any New Testament manuscript had been discovered. The small fragment of Matthew’s gospel (Matthew chapter 26, to be precise) was dated AD 66.

The discoverer of this Magdalen manuscript, Professor Carsten Thiede, made a sophisticated analysis of the handwriting of the fragment.

Using a high magnification device and the epifluorescent confocal laser scanning technique, it was possible to differentiate between 20 separate micrometer layers of the papyrus, measuring the height and depth of the ink as well as the angle of the stylus used by the scribe.

After this analysis Thiede was able to compare it with other papyri from that period. There were, for example, manuscripts found at Qumran (dated to 58 AD). There was another at Herculaneum (dated prior to 79 AD) a further one from the fortress of Masada (dated to between 73/74 AD), and finally a papyrus from the Egyptian town of Oxyrynchus.

Well, the Magdalene Manuscript fragment matches all four. In fact, it is almost a twin to the papyrus found in Oxyrynchus, which bears the date of 65 to 66 AD.

Thiede concludes that this papyrus fragment of St. Matthew's Gospel was written no later than this date, and probably earlier.

And what does that suggest? Simply this, that we have either a portion of the *original* Gospel of Matthew, *or an immediate copy* which was written while Matthew and the other disciples and eyewitnesses to the events were still alive.

After Mark, this would be the oldest manuscript portion of the New Testament in existence known today, one which co-exists with the original writers!

Careful analysis shows that it matches the Received, or Traditional Greek Text, upon which is based the King James Bible English translation. (Gail Riplinger, *The Language of the King James Bible*. Ararat, VA.: A.V. Publications Corp., 1988, p. xv)

The interval, then, between the dates of original composition and the earliest surviving evidence becomes so small as to be negligible. The general integrity of the Received Text may be regarded as finally established.

As much as critics might question its age, this is a form of intellectual resistance which cannot last. The facts are now beyond dispute.

## 9

# Could the facts have been remembered accurately?

The Polynesian explorer Kupe visited Aotearoa (New Zealand), it is said, around 925 AD. His story was told and re-told orally during succeeding generations. Later, an expedition from Tahiti had no difficulty heading direct to Aotearoa and landing in the very same coastal inlet as Kupe did – all from instructions passed down orally for 200 years!

*The critic claims:* Despite the early dating of the Gospels in the first century, there is a time gap between Jesus and the writing of the Gospels... several years during which the accounts would have to be memorized and transmitted orally. But oral memory cannot accurately preserve accounts from person to person for many years.

*In reality:* On first thought, this may seem a valid objection. It requires us to ask, how reliable is the oriental memory?

Fortunately, there is data to help us. Even the most radical of New Testament scholars (such as Professor Dennis Nineham) will assure you that the oriental memory was ‘wonderfully retentive’.

Oral recall was far more important in ancient societies, particularly Judaism. All of Jewish education consisted of rote memory. *Entire books were memorized*, word for word.

And add to that the easy-to-memorize structure of many of Jesus’ sayings. Jesus used *teaching forms that encouraged memorization*.

But even had he not, the nature of Jewish society was to memorize. We must not measure by our Western mindset the tremendous capacity of the Oriental memory. And there are sufficient parallels in Judaism to show that the disciples could have transmitted the stories of Jesus *word perfect*.

But not only was oral transmission quite adequate for the task of preserving Jesus' words and deeds, but there is *also* good reason to believe that the disciples – and sometimes even the audiences – of Jesus *took notes* during or immediately after his words and deeds.

Were you aware that there was a wide use of shorthand and the carrying of notebooks in the Graeco-Roman world? Yes, circulating of lecture notes was common practice.

Shorthand? Lecture notes? Two thousand years ago? Indeed there were. And this *almost guarantees* that *very early written records of Jesus' sayings and deeds* existed.

There is evidence that in cultures where oral memory has been trained for generations, *large amounts of information* can be preserved accurately.

### **A 'memory' culture**

An Old Testament passage (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) reveals how important oral instruction and the memory of divine teaching was stressed in Hebrew culture. The Jews placed a high value on memorizing inspired Scripture and whatever writing reflected the wisdom of God. Memorization skills among ancient Jews were far advanced compared to ours today. Theirs was a culture of memory.

Oral recall was far more important in ancient societies, particularly Judaism, than we have commonly allowed for.

The techniques used for memorization by ancient societies as a whole have a remarkable similarity to techniques promulgated

by today's "memory improvement" seminars that folk now pay exorbitant fees to attend.

Jewish rabbis were encouraged to memorize entire books of the Scriptures, even the whole Old Testament. In fact, all of Jewish education consisted of rote memory.

Students were expected to remember the major events of narratives - although incidentals could be varied, if the main point was not affected. (Michael J. and J. P. Moreland, eds. *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995, p. 32)

### ***Reliability of oral tradition***

In societies attuned to oral transmission, variants are minor, and seldom occur, so that even within one or two generations there is little change. Then even when changes do occur, there is no doubt as to the actual message and the wording of the tradition.

How much better, then, would the Gospels reflect the words of Jesus, considering the short time span between their composition and publication?

### ***Why oral tradition accurately preserved Jesus' teachings***

General studies of *oral transmission* show it to be more *reliable* than critics would presuppose:

1. Jesus' Messianic presentations would reinforce among His followers the need to preserve His words accurately.
2. Ninety percent of Jesus' teachings and sayings use memory-aiding methods similar to those used in Hebrew poetry.
3. Jesus trained His disciples to go out and teach His lessons even while He was teaching them.
4. Since Jewish boys were educated until they were twelve, Jesus' disciples probably already knew how to read and write.

5. Just as Jewish and Greek teachers gathered disciples, Jesus *gathered and trained His*.

### ***Jesus taught with memory-aiding devices***

There is a growing awareness of the easy-to-memorize structure of many of Jesus' sayings.

He used memory-aiding devices, such as parables, exaggerations, puns, metaphors and similes, proverbs, riddles, and parabolic actions, to aid his disciples and audience in retaining his teachings. And he used poetry for this purpose.

It is evident that Jesus thought out carefully and deliberately formulated his utterances.

We know also that the early Christians preserved Jesus' teachings in the form of hymns which were likewise easy to memorize. Paul's summary of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15 is a good example of this.

### ***Jesus kept repeating his message***

Modern psycholinguistic studies have confirmed that the techniques that characterized Jesus' oral teaching methods would have ensured excellent semantic recall.

If we come to the ministry of Jesus as first-century historians, and forget our twentieth-century assumptions about mass media, the overwhelming probability is that most of what Jesus said, he said not twice but 200 times, with (of course) a myriad of local variations. (N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress, p. 123)

We might ignore the memory-aiding nature of Jesus' teaching; and even the tremendous capacity of the oriental memory. Yet it still needs to be considered that whatever Jesus taught, he would, as any teacher, have taught it many, many times -

ensuring that His disciples would have the entire set of lessons committed to memory.

### ***Necessity of oral recording***

It should be realized that the farther one got from the Jewish Establishment, the more one tended to record oral traditions.

In ‘mainstream’ Judaism one’s belief system was reinforced weekly in the Synagogue. All the social and cultural structures reinforced the Establishment’s oral traditions. However, the farther out one’s beliefs were in relation to the mainstream—the more that extra efforts needed to be made to keep the oral belief system in mind.

Christianity began as a sect WITHIN Judaism. And it began to experience serious exclusion from ‘mainstream’ Judaism in the early 30s. (We might note in this connection the stoning of Stephen and persecutions by Saul - Acts chapters 7 and 8).

It is probable, therefore, that the new movement had to do as did others (such as the Qumran group) before them - WRITE down the material to be used by new believers and worship groups.

Then, as time passed, and the worship services and gatherings were forced ‘underground’, and the leaders murdered, there developed an increasing need for written materials for preserving the core of the faith.

### ***Too illiterate to preserve Jesus’ message?***

***The critic claims:*** The real authors were unknown. Living much later, they simply attributed their documents to known persons who had lived earlier – the point being that ***none of Jesus’ followers wrote books.*** (Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, p. 116) Acts 4:13 says that John and Peter were illiterate. How, then, did they write the books attributed to them?

***In reality:*** John and Peter were only two men out of hundreds of Jesus' original group of disciples who, like Matthew, could act as scribes. Acts 4:13 does NOT indicate that Peter and John were non-literate, but that they had not studied under the recognised Pharisaic Rabbis.

The fact is, Jewish boys were educated until they were twelve. Therefore Jesus' disciples probably already knew how to read and write.

In the first century there were great numbers of people with scribal skills. Many of them would have heard Jesus speak and become followers. It is not improbable that these folk took notes. And some of these may very well have been included in Luke's comment: "*MANY have taken in hand to put together an account of Jesus' life.*" (Luke 1:1)

Matthew was a tax collector. His occupation required a very complex system of record-keeping. He would have been proficient in the three languages of Palestine: Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic.

As John Wenham points out:

It is known that in Egypt at this date there were 111 kinds of tax, and many of the tax-collectors knew shorthand. Matthew's livelihood was earned by interviewing tax-payers and discussing their affairs (usually in Aramaic) and then writing up his reports in Greek. He had a lifelong habit of noting things down and of preserving what he had written. (John Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark and Luke*. Downers Grove: IVP, 1992, pp. 112-113)

He also notes:

Goodspeed suggests that Jesus found himself in a similar position to Isaiah, when it became clear that his message was going to be rejected by the people as

a whole. He deliberately took steps for the preservation of his teaching among his disciples. He observed the faith and commitment of Levi the tax-collector and recognized him as one who was capable of making a record of his teaching. (*Ibid.*)

### ***Note-taking practised***

There is a growing body of evidence and arguments that supports the thesis that the disciples (and sometimes even the audiences of Jesus) “took notes” during or immediately after His words/deeds....

The only hypothesis with enough flexibility to meet the requirements is that a body of loose notes stands behind the bulk of the synoptic tradition. The wide use of shorthand and the carrying of notebooks in the Graeco-Roman world, the school practice of circulating lecture notes and utilizing them in published works, and the later transmission of rabbinic tradition through shorthand notes support this hypothesis. As a former publican, the Apostle Matthew would have been admirably fitted to fill a position as note-taker in the band of uneducated apostles....

The use of oral tradition IN NO WAY implies that “written tradition” did NOT occur. The body of allegedly oral traditions of the rabbis of Jesus’ day was transmitted orally during His day. Eventually it was written down into the Mishnah, but “even after its definitive compilation, the Mishnah (as well as a great deal more interpretive material of the Rabbis) continued to be passed on primarily by rote for centuries to come” (Kugel, EBI:68). The point is that the oral transmission process CONTINUED even after the definitive compilation of that oral

tradition! (John Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark and Luke*.  
Downers Grove: IVP, 1992)

### ***Oral tradition preserved even after written down***

Tony Lentz presents to us a reason why oral tradition was preserved even after the introduction of written versions:

The ancients often called the written word into question because it did not have the authority of an honest man's character to support its credibility.

(Tony M. Lentz, *Orality and Literacy in Hellenic Greece*.  
Carbondale: Southern Illinois U. Press, 1989, p.77)

To put it another way, you cannot ask questions of a piece of paper to determine that it is telling the truth.

### ***Conclusion***

Not only was oral transmission quite adequate for the task of preserving the words and deeds of Jesus, but the widespread use of note-taking and an ample supply of literate listeners almost guarantees that *very early* written sources for the gospel materials would have existed.

There is good reason to believe that the oral tradition accurately preserved the teachings and the events of Jesus' life until they were written down just a few years later.

One can, therefore, have confidence that the material in the Gospels is historically reliable.



## **PART 4**

# **HAS THE NEW TESTAMENT BEEN ALTERED?**



# 10

## How much time for a myth to grow?

*The critic claims:* The New Testament writings were changed. Jesus' followers, over time, changed the Gospels to make Jesus say he was God – and to suggest that he rose from the dead.

*In reality:* It is true, the Gospels we have today *do* report Jesus claiming to be more than a man and accepting worship as God. (Matthew 4:10; 8:2; 14:33; John 5:18; 9:35-39; 20:20-27)

The question to be asked must be this: Is our present New Testament the result of the original Gospels having been altered, or is it the same as what was originally written? Here is how this can be resolved:

Firstly, we have already established the VERY EARLY dating of the Gospels.

Secondly, we can cross-check with writers such as Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Barnabas and Hermas, all late first century (See Chapter 7), whose lives overlapped those of many original Christians, including John. Clement intimately knew several of the original apostles. Quoting the Gospels, these first century writers show us what was in those Gospels.

Thirdly, their quotes are consistent with the content of the New Testament we possess today.

What does this tell us? Simply this: that the message in our New Testament matches the quoted content of those early Gospels.

The question to be asked, then, is, could myths have crept into the writings between the Autograph originals (all completed

between AD 37 and AD 66) and the time of Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Barnabas and Hermas (c. AD 60 to AD 110)? What is the time gap between the originals and independent quotes from them? Compare those dates. Do you notice the overlap?

There are two more questions we must ask.

1. If the original Gospel reports were just myth, could a mere myth have gained such acceptance and had the impact it did, unless there was a basis of truth in it?

For this to have happened would be as fantastic as for me to write a biography of, say, Ronald Reagan - and in it say he claimed to be God, to forgive peoples' sins, and to have risen from the dead. Oh, come on! Such a story is so wild it would never get off the ground - because there are still too many people around who knew Reagan!

2. How long does it take for a myth to develop?

Historians agree it takes about two generations, or eighty years, for legendary accounts to establish themselves.

One can agree that the Gospels deal with some extraordinary events.

We have already established the VERY EARLY dating of the Gospels. And it is an unavoidable fact that substantial myths could never have developed *in such a brief time*... especially while there were eyewitnesses alive to correct the error. The *early* dating of the Gospel writings allowed *no adequate time for the growth of such a myth*.

You can be sure that hostile witnesses would have served as a corrective if false claims about Jesus were going around.

On the growth of legends, we should listen to Dr Sherwin-White, respected Graeco-Roman classical historian of Oxford University. He insists that the passage of two generations was *not even enough time* for legend to develop in the ancient world and wipe out a solid core of historical truth. (A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978, pp. 186-193)

Consider the resurrection claim. If Jesus was merely a man and didn't rise from the dead, then no resurrection legend could have got off the ground so quickly. But the news of Jesus' resurrection was being broadcast far and wide *within that same decade!* And thousands were accepting it.

The Gospels were written so early that there was *no time* for a myth – if that's all it was – to develop. These documents were widely circulated during the lifetimes of eyewitnesses to the events of Jesus' life. If any information was faulty, those eyewitnesses could easily have corrected it.

There are no longer any grounds to dispute this: The idea of a fully divine Jesus who worked miracles and rose from the dead was proclaimed *during the very first decade* of Christianity. It was not some legend that arose decades later.

Even that Magdalen Manuscript, a surviving early portion of the Gospel of Matthew from before 66 AD, uses holy names for Jesus in its text, such as the diminutive "IS" for Jesus and "KE" for Kurie or Lord – that is, "Lord Jesus". (*The Times*, Saturday, December 24, 1994)

This points to the godhead of Jesus – as well as his resurrection - being recognised *in the first century*.

A man who can read Matthew's and John's Gospels and not see this, can look all over the sky at noon on a cloudless day and not see the sun.

# 11

## Wasn't the Bible later corrupted?

This question was raised before, in chapters 4 and 5. But we need to zero in on it more fully.

*The critic claims:* You cannot trust the Bible, because it was 'forged' in key 'theological places by the Roman Emperor Constantine and his mob in the fourth century.

*In reality:* What bothers me is this. We have some otherwise intelligent fellows choking on this myth like a dog on a bone. Come on, guys. Let's get real. Only about 45 surviving Greek manuscripts of the New Testament (*a mere 1 percent*) are the fruit of Constantine's project.

What is more, these represent only *one tiny geographical area* – Alexandria, the center of pagan philosophy. It was Origen's corrupted manuscript from Alexandria that Constantine adopted in Rome for his project.

### 99% not corrupted

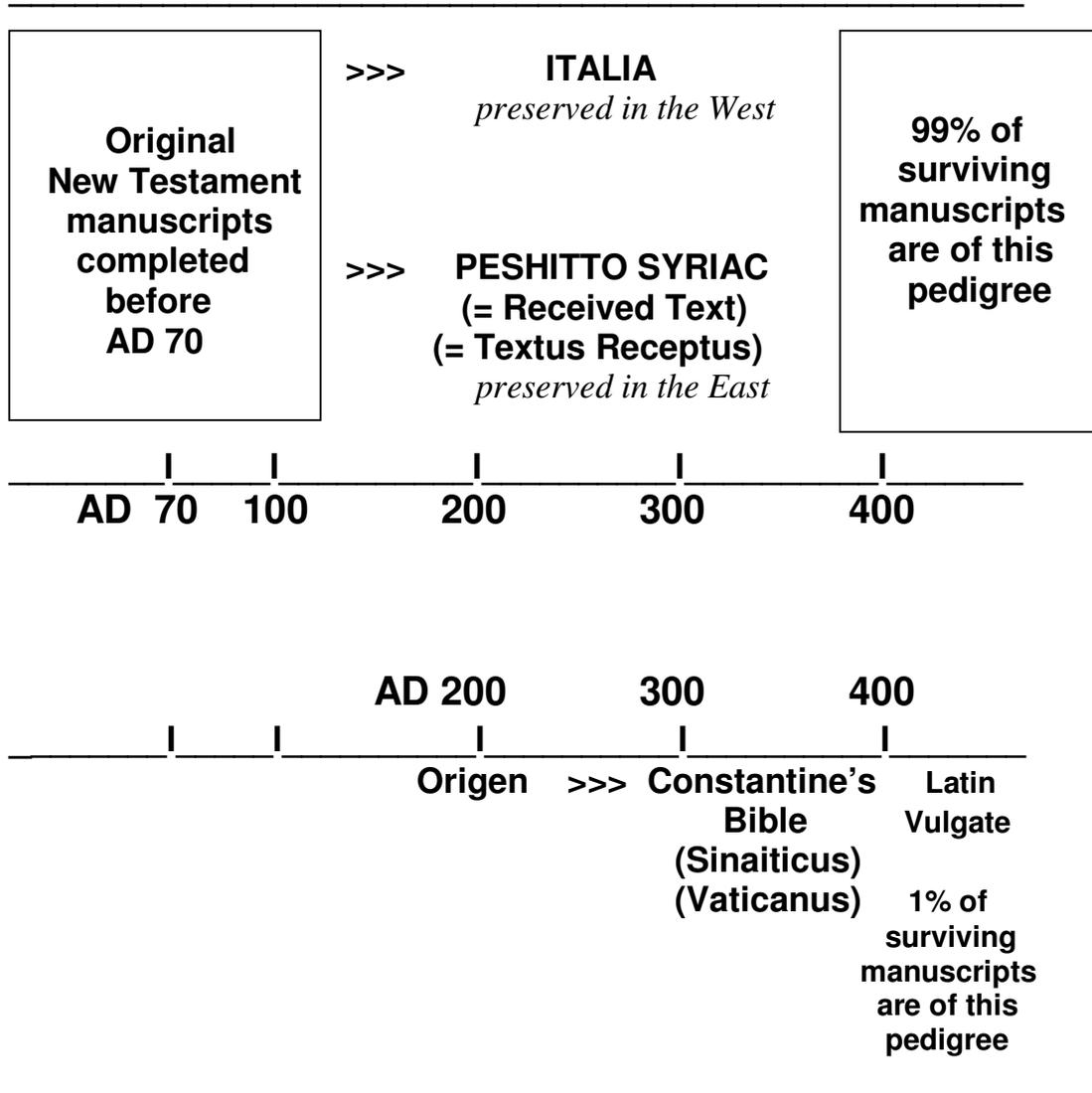
The truth is, the majority of New Testament manuscripts had nothing to do with Constantine's capers. These comprise over 5,000 manuscripts (99 percent of all surviving Greek manuscripts of the New Testament).

And these come not from one location, but from Asia Minor, Greece, Syria, Africa, Gaul, Italy, England, Ireland and just about everywhere else.

But... what really gets to me is how the critic repeatedly and systematically *ignores this 99 percent majority of manuscripts*.

Then he points to the scanty 1 percent in a bid to convince us that Constantine has corrupted the Bible? And this constitutes the principal basis for his argument! Would you call that “unscholarly” and “unscientific”? Or do you smell something?

Of course, the critic may hope that you will never hear about this vast majority of uncorrupted manuscripts that were beyond Constantine’s reach.



Okay, then, what do we know about this majority of manuscripts?

## 12

# What copies escaped corruption?

As we've just noted, many Christians who had access to the original Bible preserved it in regions outside Rome's control. This is why it is still possible for you to cross-check and get at the truth.

You see, historically there are *two streams of manuscripts*.

### ***One stream deliberately corrupted***

One has been messed up by a super power, in a bid for total spiritual and political control. That sabotage was centered in Alexandria, thence in Rome.

Only two centuries after Constantine's time, the church of Rome began to rule Europe. And Europe slipped into the Dark Ages. A major suppression kept the unchanged manuscripts out of the reach of most Europeans.

### ***The other transmitted with care***

While the Scriptures were suffering corruption in Alexandria and Rome, the *unchanged* text was being *preserved* carefully *in numerous other places* which the corrupters could not reach. This text was known as the Peshitta, or Syriac Aramaic.

Today, the vast majority of surviving manuscripts are from this source. Hence it is termed the Majority, or Traditional, Text.

You don't hear many critics talk about this. Why not? I can think of two reasons. Is it because they don't know, or are they lying to us? Take your pick.

### ***Preserved in the East***

When the Christians fled from Jerusalem, the initial world headquarters of Christianity, in 66 AD, prior to its destruction by the Romans, they made their way first to Pella, thence to Antioch. This became the new world headquarters of the Christian movement.

A version of Aramaic called ‘Syriac Aramaic’ was the *lingua franca* of the Galilee region in the first century, which tells us that this is likely the language the majority of the New Testament writers spoke.

It is a material fact that an ancient Aramaic New Testament manuscript exists – and ***has been in continuous use since*** ancient times by the Church of the East.

In ***the same original language*** the New Testament was first written in?

That’s right. The apostles would have written their books in Hebrew or Aramaic - the official languages of the synagogue. This would not have stopped their almost immediate translation into Koine Greek, the common language of the day.

The old tradition of the Syrian church is that the Bible in Syriac Aramaic, known as the Peshitta (common language) Bible, was the work of the apostle Mark; while others claim the apostle Thaddeus (Jude) translated it. In any case, you can be certain of this - by about 150 AD there was already a translation of the New Testament into Syriac made. (Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*)

We are indebted to researchers such as Dr Benjamin Wilkinson - and others - for some of this information. Wilkinson’s ability as a scholar and researcher came to the notice of Cordell Hull, then U.S. Secretary of State. He issued Wilkinson with credentials

which virtually unlocked to him the vaults of the world. This enabled him to examine rare historical documents and manuscripts that are normally locked away from the public.

And what did Wilkinson discover? Nothing less than one of history's most massive cover-ups.

In the reign of the Roman emperor Aurelian, Roman and Alexandrian bishops arrived in Antioch in an attempt to press their Romanised teachings. Lucian, of the Christian college at Antioch, a keen Antioch scholar, noticed that the Scriptures they brought were substantially different. He saw that they had taken unwarranted licence in removing or adding pages to the Bible manuscripts. ( Benjamin Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant*. Payson, AZ: Leaves-of-Autumn Books, Inc. 1988, p. 50)

As a counter to the corrupted manuscripts, Lucian certified the apostolic originals without change, in the Aramaic language of the common people. He also translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek.

John Burgon noted that the churches of the region of Syria have always used this Peshitta (common language) Bible. There has never been a time when these churches did not use the Peshitta. Lucian's Bible was thereafter preserved through most of the East. (Nolan, *The Integrity of the Greek Vulgate*, p. 72)

In Antioch, they were translated into Syriac about 150 AD. This translation was called the Peshitta (common language) Bible. (Hort, *Introduction*, p. 143)

Copies of the Peshitta were eagerly sought by the growing Eastern Church and taken eastward into Persia, Armenia, India, China and Japan. (Burgon and Miller, *The Traditional Text*, p. 128)

The Bible was translated from the Greek into Syriac and Hindi in the East, and in the West into Latin as early as 157 AD.

So within the lifetime of the generation following the first apostles, the world had the benefit of the New Testament written in Greek, Latin and Syriac languages.

Whatever may be the future use and importance of those manuscripts, one thing is certain, and that is, they establish the fact that the Syrian Christians of India have the pure unadulterated Scriptures in the language of the ancient church of Antioch, derived from the very times of the Apostles. (T. Yeates, *Indian Church History*, p. 169)

Separated from the Western world for a thousand years, they were naturally ignorant of many novelties introduced by the councils and decrees of the Lateran. (J.W. Massie, *Continental India*, Vol. 2, p. 120)

It was in these sequestered regions that copies of the Syriac Scriptures found a safe asylum from the search and destruction of the Romish inquisitors, and were found with all the marks of ancient purity.” (T. Yeates, *Indian Church History*, p. 167)

This early Eastern translation of the New Testament agreed with today’s Traditional (Received) Text. Even proponents of the critical text will generally admit this. (Dr E. V. Hills *The King James Version Defended*, p.172).

Here we find the Syrian church of the apostles - one of the earliest churches of the Christian era - using a translation of the New Testament which matches our Traditional (Majority) Text. This speaks in thunder tones that the Traditional Text was the true text of the New Testament, with roots leading back to the original autograph.

### ***Preserved also in the West***

In the West, Paul and other original apostles had spread the Christian message throughout the Roman Empire. In particular

this included the Latin communities of northern Italy and the numerous Celtic communities of Asia Minor.

The Galatians (in the territory of what is today Turkey) spread the Gospel to their kinsmen in Gaul, thence to England, Scotland and Ireland, who had come to know Latin under the influence of the empire. Although they retained their Gallic language, they also used the Latin language of the Roman Empire.

To suit their needs, the Koine Greek manuscripts were translated into Latin. This was the forerunner of what would become known as the Italia Bible.

The Italic or pre-Waldensian Church (the Vaudois in the French Alps) received the Scriptures from apostolic groups from Antioch of Syria, and were formed into a church about AD 120. (Allix, *Churches of Piedmont*, 1690, p. 37) They completed a translation of the New Testament from the Received (Traditional) Text by AD 157. Both Calvin's associate and successor, Theodore Beza and the noted church historian Frederic Nolan confirm this. This date is less than one hundred years after most of the books of the New Testament were written.

Some people today, when they hear the word Latin used in conjunction with the Bible or church, make the mistake of assuming automatically that it is associated with the Roman Catholic Church. However, this is not true. According to the great Swiss reformer Theodore Beza, the Italic Church of northern Italy had been born in AD 120. Its remoteness isolated it from the influence of the Church at Rome.

The Italic Church was the forerunner of churches in this same region, later to be known as Vaudois or Waldenses. Both of these names simply mean "peoples of the valleys."

The Waldenses were among the first group in Europe to obtain a translation of the Bible.

### ***Persecution, then infiltration***

As Christianity spread through the empire, paganism began to fall back on its heels. So the Legion of Lucifer declared full scale war against Christians.

Persecution followed. But their numbers continued to multiply. The Caesars, as puppets of the Lucifer Legion, tried to stop the movement, but in vain.

So a shrewd plan was hatched... It was decided to infiltrate the movement and destroy it from within - with a phony system of Christianity.

This plan was launched in Rome, the capital city of the empire. Once the church in the city of Rome was established with armies at its disposal, it then set out to eliminate all opposition within the Christian world to the imitation Christianity it had set up. Numerous historians have documented this event.

### ***The faithful flee into wilderness regions***

The real Bible Christians knew Lucifer had created a religious monster and had called it Christian. They knew it was phony, satanic and totally unchristian. So to save their families, many withdrew to the hills. True Christianity went underground for about 1,000 years.

The gigantic pseudo-Christian power based in Rome emerged as the visible, ruling body over kings and nations.

That part of the Alpine chain which extends between Turin on the east and Grenoble on the west is known as the Cottian Alps. The valleys within this area became a haven for many Bible Christians. From these valleys they eventually derived the name Vaudois, or Waldenses.

These Waldenses were among the first groups in Europe to obtain a translation of the Bible from the Koine Greek manuscripts.

They insisted on following the Bible, pure and unaltered, as their rule of faith. For a thousand years, throughout the Dark Ages, they were to preserve it uncorrupted.

Even Rome's acclaimed authority Augustine around 400 AD said:

Now among translations themselves the Italian [Italia] is to be preferred to the others, for it keeps closer to the words without prejudice to clearness of expression. (*Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers* [Christian Lit. edition], Vol II, p. 542)

This contrasts with the later hatred generated by Rome against this same Bible which Augustine had praised.

As to the antiquity of the Waldensians' Italia Bible, the evidence is, as Dr Scrivener affirms, that "The Latin Bible, the Italic, was translated from the Greek no later than 157 AD." (*Scrivener's Introduction*, Vol. II, p. 43)

In fact, it is difficult to imagine any Bibles being closer to the apostles' original autographs than the Peshitta (in the East) and the Italia (in the West). The translators of these Bibles could very well have been born during the lifetime of some of Jesus' disciples.

The point of greater importance is that the Italia (or Old Latin) was translated from the Received Text. This indicates that the Received (Traditional) Text definitely existed and was used by churches in early church history.

The isolation of the Waldenses – as well as their fervent reverence for the Bible unchanged – enabled them to preserve it from the rampant corruption going on elsewhere.

### ***Aren't there any differences?***

Of course, there are some minor differences between the numerous hand-copied manuscripts of the Majority Text. And this should not surprise us.

After all, by the year 200 AD there must have been hundreds of copies of the New Testament in weekly use in Christian meetings... as well as numerous copies in the possession of those who could afford to buy them.

Considering that we possess more than 5,000 separate hand made copies, it should not surprise us if accidental mistakes were made by copyists. But the manuscripts of the books of the New Testament would be very nearly exact copies of what the apostles themselves wrote. A thorough checking shows that the differences are negligible and do not change any key Gospel teaching.

The truth is, there would have been a majority text from the beginning - reliable copies of the Autographa, as the original manuscripts are called. Such copies of the New Testament were multiplied in every region for church use, and this proved a safeguard against the worst forms of corruption. These would serve as a means of checking, when variations occurred.

### ***Majority of mss virtually identical***

Of course, heretical copyists would certainly have made deliberate changes in their copies of the New Testament books. Most of these changes, it is believed, were already in existence by the year 200 AD. But these changes were no more "than eddies along the edge of the 'majority' river" (W.N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*. Nelson, New York, 1977, p. 109), because the Traditional Text is found in the vast majority of the surviving manuscripts.

Now think how amazing this is, that - amid the overwhelming thousands of manuscripts - the copyists of different countries

and different ages succeeded in preserving a virtually *identical* Bible.

*Harvard Theological Review* cites Kirsopp Lake's exhaustive examination of manuscripts which revealed this "*uniformity* of the text exhibited by the vast majority of the New Testament manuscripts."

As we have already noted, the Traditional (or Received) Text was the Bible of the great Syrian church; the Waldensian church of northern Italy; the Gallic church of southern France; the Celtic church of Scotland and Ireland, and the Greek church. All of these churches were in opposition to the Church of Rome.

And it was used virtually everywhere else, including Syria, India, China and Japan. (Claudius Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia*, 1812, p. 140)

After the Portuguese Jesuits arrived in India in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, enforcing the Inquisition, the church records and literature of the Thomas Churches (founded by the apostle Thomas in the first century) in India, mysteriously disappeared. But thanks to historians and travelers who recorded their experiences, we can piece together an interesting picture of the early Indian Christians, which links them to the early Antioch church. (Mingana, *Early Spread of Christianity*. Bulletin of John Rylands Library, Vol. 10, p. 459)

After the seeming endlessness of the Dark Ages, the long isolated Eastern and Western streams in the 16<sup>th</sup> century finally yielded their respective Bibles publicly. And when they were compared, there was virtual agreement between them.

Again, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Claudius Buchanan visited Christian communities living in the mountainous interior of South India. They told him, "We have preserved the Bible. The Hindu Princes never touched our liberty of conscience." (*Ibid.*, p.117)

A surviving Syriac Bible was graciously offered to Dr Buchanan, who placed it in the Cambridge University Library for safe-keeping.

In November, 1990, the Chaldean Metropolitan in Trichur, South India, Dr Aprem, who has examined this Syriac Bible, being familiar with the Syriac, claimed to H.H. Meyer that it agrees very substantially with the English King James Bible. (H.H. Meyer, *The Inquisitive Christians*. Morisset, Australia: New Millennium Publications, 1992, pp. 81-82)

No wonder the Indian Syriac Bible was hated and hunted for destruction by the Portuguese Roman Catholic Jesuits when they established the Inquisition in India!

Buchanan revealed regarding the Armenian Christians of Hindutan (India): “They have preserved the Bible in its purity, and their doctrines are, as far as the author knows, the doctrines of the Bible. Besides, they maintain the solemn observances of Christian worship, throughout our Empire, on the seventh day.” (Claudius Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia*, 1812, p. 266)

### ***Why do most manuscripts so closely agree?***

As we have noted, the vast majority of the surviving manuscripts support the Traditional Text. And we may ask, how is this agreement between so many widespread copies to be accounted for?

Some critics will assert that the Traditional Text is *not* the real, original text. They will suggest to you that first, about AD 250 - and then again about AD 350 - editors at Antioch selected readings from the different texts they found, so as to form a new text, the Traditional Text. Thus, an authoritative Standard Text was fabricated at Antioch. And that ecclesiastical authorities, after organising this revision of the text, then imposed it upon the churches. So this great majority of manuscripts that agree among themselves (except a very small handful) are nothing else but transcripts.

The critic may then postulate that this revised text was taken to Constantinople and became the dominant text of the imperial city. That's why it became the dominant text of the whole Greek-speaking church. It became the official text which had the backing of the church, and so the other texts fell into disuse.

That's the story they hope you'll believe. It might even sound plausible.

***Did church editors fabricate the Traditional Text?***

But not so fast, Jack. Consider this carefully. And you'll soon see that it's an improbable and irrational conjecture, if ever there was one!

Here's what to do. Just *ask them to provide evidence* for this claim. Tellingly, your request will go unanswered.

Why? Because there is *no historical evidence* whatsoever of such a revision. There is *no evidence* that official editors created the Traditional Text.

It would be strange if church history had *no record* of such a revision when it gives us the names of revisers of the Septuagint and the Vulgate. There is *also no evidence* that church authorities imposed any such "new text" on the church.

Such crude speculations do not stand up to careful scrutiny.

Yes, the manuscripts agree together very closely, but not so closely as to suggest that this agreement was produced by the work of editors or the pronouncements of church leaders or by any mass production of manuscripts by scribes.

Then why is there substantial agreement seen among 99 percent of these surviving manuscripts? It is because of their general fidelity to the inspired originals.

The majority of the manuscripts agree together so closely because they are good copies of copies of the original New Testament books. Here are many witnesses of high character, coming to us from every quarter of primitive Christendom. They are independent witnesses to the true text of the New Testament.

The importance of the sheer number of manuscript copies and their 99 percent agreement with the Traditional Text cannot be overstated.

***If preserved for 1,500 years since,  
then why not for the first 250 years?***

Dean Burgon puts it well:

And surely, if it be allowable to assume... that for 1532 years, (viz. from A.D. 350 to A.D. 1882) the Antiochian standard has been faithfully retained and transmitted, - it will be impossible to assign any valid reason why the inspired Original itself, the Apostolic standard, should not have been as faithfully transmitted and retained from the Apostolic age to the Antiochian (i.e. say, from A.D. 90 to A.D. 250-350) - i.e. throughout an interval of less than 250 years, or one-sixth of the period. (Dean John W. Burgon, *The Revision Revised*, pp. 295-96)

In other words (and updating this statement), if the Antiochian text has been faithfully transmitted for the past 1657 years, then why not also during the first 250 years?

***An unbroken chain?***

In any case, Christianity's development can be traced as an unbroken growth time-line from Jesus. There were no time gaps. Historically, there is ***an unbroken, straight line*** from the teaching of Jesus in the thirties to the writings of Paul and the other apostles in the mid to latter half of the ***first century***.

You will probably agree with this observation by Josh McDowell, a former skeptic:

When an event takes place in history and there are enough people alive who were eyewitnesses of it or had participated in the event, and when the information is published, one is able to verify the validity of an historical event. (Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*. San Bernardino, Ca.: Here's Life Publishers, Inc., 1986, p.189)

Let me ask you, is it likely that a book, describing alleged events that occurred in the same city *publicly* only 10 to 40 years previously, could have been widely accepted if the accounts of abnormal events in it were false or mythical?

We all know that the *memory* of all elderly persons concerning events of even 40 years back, is still *perfectly clear*.

Who could today publish a biography of Richard Nixon, full of anecdotes about *public* events which were blatantly untrue? They would be contradicted at once. They would not be accepted and passed on as true.

Just so, there was no way the New Testament writers could have got away with pure fabrication of public events. As Luke himself records, there were plenty of eyewitnesses.

The assertion that the New Testament Jesus is just a myth will not bear close scrutiny.

This calls for intellectual honesty. The evidence makes perfect sense – enough to assure us that the Jesus account is not founded on delusions or clever fables, but on historical events. And however unusual they may be, these are indeed the greatest events that have ever happened in the history of the world.

That's what true history is - a knowledge of the past based on *testimony*.

Perhaps you don't agree with that definition. So may I ask, Do you believe Lincoln lived and was President of the United States? Of course you do. But do you know anyone who has personally seen Lincoln? We know only by testimony.

# 13

## How many manuscripts have survived?

“This Greenland glacier is sliding into the sea five times faster than it was two years ago.” Sitting at his computer in the United States, my friend Cal sends this email out to hundreds of people.

In turn, some recipients will re-send it to other friends. After a few re-sendings, it comes through Outlook Express into my box.

Receiving it this morning and reading down to the end, I might very well shrug it off with some comment like, “One cannot know what was in the original email.” As I said, by nature I am a cautious person, tending to be skeptical. But where should skepticism end and common sense begin?

If, from thousands of copies, we can trace the chain of senders, right back to Cal, or nearly so – and if we were to get ourselves hundreds of copies of that email, all from different stages of the re-sending process... do you think we would get a pretty good idea of what was originally in Cal’s email?

***The critic claims:*** We cannot know what was in the original New Testament writings.

***In reality:*** So here we go again. But how many manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament are in existence today? Answer: more than 24,000! We have already mentioned the 5,686 known Greek manuscripts, but there are also 10,000 Latin, at least 9,300 other language early manuscripts.

No other document from the ancient world even begins to approach such numbers. Homer’s *Iliad* comes second with only 643 surviving manuscripts.

New Testament.....24,970 manuscripts  
 Iliad.....643 manuscripts

The *number* of available manuscripts of the New Testament is overwhelmingly *greater than those of any other work of* ancient literature. That's because the New Testament books were the most frequently copied and widely circulated books of antiquity. (S.E. Peters, *The Harvest of Hellenism*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971, p.50)

No one questions the authenticity of the historical books of antiquity just because we do not possess the original copies. Yet we have far fewer manuscripts of these works than we possess of the New Testament.

The truth is simply this: that no documents of the ancient world are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament. There is more evidence in support of the New Testament than **ALL THE REST OF ANCIENT LITERATURE COMBINED**. It is in a class by itself.

To be consistent, if I am skeptical of the New Testament text, I will be forced to reject all of the classical writings of antiquity. To deny the text of the New Testament is to dismiss the validity of the entire written ancient history of mankind - for none of it can pass the tests that the New Testament passes.

The importance of the sheer number of manuscript copies cannot be overstated.

Why, then, is the critic so vocal? Is it because he just doesn't know? Or is there some other reason? You be the judge.

Jesus... Is it because he is too great for us... that we are dazzled and blinded by his pure nature... and our perverseness cries out against him? Is it because this Galilean is too much for our small hearts?

## 14

# How close are these to the originals?

But what about the *gap in time* between the *originals* that no longer exist and the *oldest copies* we have?

That's a good question. Let's first consider other ancient authors... say, for example, Homer. It is impossible to pin down with any certainty when Homer lived. Eratosthenes gives the traditional date of 1184 BC for the end of the Trojan War, the event which forms the basis for Homer's *Iliad*. The great Greek historian Herodotus put the date at 1250 BC. But Greek historians were far less certain about the dates for Homer's life. Some said he was a contemporary of the events of the *Iliad*, while others placed him sixty or a hundred or several hundred years afterward. Herodotus estimated that Homer lived and wrote in the ninth century BC.

Do you know that the oldest complete preserved text of Homer dates only back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century? (Charles Leach, *Our Bible. How We Got It*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1898, p.145) So there's a time gap between the oldest copy and the original of at least 2,200 years.

Just take a look at these. It's almost embarrassing:

- For *Caesar's Gallic Wars* (composed between 58 and 50 BC) several manuscripts survive, but only 9 or 10 are good – and the oldest is some 900 years later than his day.
- For the *Roman History* of Livy (59 BC to AD 17), of the 142 books, only 35 survive. And only one (containing fragments of Books III-VI) is as old as the fourth century.
- Of the *Histories of Tacitus* (c. AD 100), of the 14 books, only 4½ survive.

- Of his *Annals*, of the 16 books, only 10 survive in full and 2 in part. All of this depends entirely of two manuscripts, one of the ninth century and one of the eleventh.
- Of the *History of Thucydides* (c. 460-400 BC), only 8 manuscripts survive, the oldest dating from about AD 900, except for a few scraps dating from about the beginning of the Christian era.
- The same goes for the History of Herodotus (488-428 BC).

Just think about this. We have no manuscripts of Julius Caesar's *Gallic Wars* copied within half a dozen centuries of his lifetime, yet we have Gospel texts written within decades of the apostles. Was Julius Caesar literate? Is he really the author of his works? No one dares ask such questions, yet the evidence for his authorship is puny, compared to the voluminous ancient attestation for those who wrote the New Testament books.

In point of time, the earliest surviving manuscripts of the New Testament are *much closer* to the originals than is the case with almost any other piece of ancient literature.

***Comparison with other ancient works  
– almost embarrassing***

Sir Frederic G. Kenyon was director and principal librarian of the British Museum. This man was second to none in authority concerning manuscripts. And this is what he informs us:

... besides number, the manuscripts of the New Testament differ from those of the classical authors, and this time the difference is clear gain. In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest extant manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament.

Then he reveals that the earliest virtually *complete* surviving New Testaments (with some trifling scraps excepted) are of the fourth century – say from 250 to 300 years later.

This may sound a considerable interval, but it is nothing to that which parts most of the classical authors from their earliest manuscripts. We believe that we have in all essentials an accurate text of the seven extant plays of Sophocles; yet the earliest substantial manuscript upon which it is based was written more than 1400 years after the poet's death. (Frederic G. Kenyon, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*. London: Macmillan and Company, 1901, p.4)

As you can see, the oldest known manuscripts of most of the Greek classical authors are dated *1,000 years or more after* the author's death – and the number of surviving copies is in many instances so small. Yet no classical scholar would doubt their trustworthiness. *By comparison*, some virtually complete New Testament individual books date back to *only one century* from the original writings. (And we have fragments of them still earlier.) It is clear that the reliability of the New Testament is likewise assured.

The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established. (Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology*. New York: Harper and Row, 1940, p. 288)

Scholars accept the writings of the ancient classics as generally trustworthy, right? Clearly, then, the reliability of the New Testament text is likewise assured.

So what have we? Two things:

- (1) the *overwhelming number* of manuscripts and
- (2) their *proximity to the originals*.

Such a “mountain of evidence” gives the New Testament *great historical credibility*.

It stands to reason that “on the basis of manuscript tradition alone, the works that made up the Christians’ New Testament were the most frequently copied and widely circulated books of antiquity.” (F.E. Peters, *The Harvest of Hellenism*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971, p. 50)

The sheer number of manuscript copies means we can reconstruct the original *with virtually complete accuracy*.

“Oh, no, that’s not right,” insists the critic. “There are 200,000 contradictions in the New Testament text.”

“What?”

“Yes, 200,000 contradictions.”

Hey, what’s going on here? We’d better look into this, right? So here goes...

# 15

## How much of the text is in doubt?

*It is claimed:* There are 200,000 contradictions in the New Testament text.

*In reality:* Contradictions, no; 200,000 textual variations, yes. There's a big difference!

*It is claimed:* But if there are 200,000 different readings in the surviving New Testament texts, then probably there is not one paragraph in two manuscripts that is the same.

*In reality:* It is doubtful that any critic has examined these. But there is one man who has. Benjamin Warfield investigated the differences thoroughly. And here's his report:

He says, "nineteen-twentieths... are of so little importance that their adoption or rejection would cause no appreciable difference in the sense of the passages where they occur." (Benjamin B. Warfield, *Introduction to Textual Criticism of the New Testament*. Seventh edition. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907, p. 14)

It boils down to this. Let the critic assert that a certain passage should not be in there, or that one has been omitted. It really makes not an atom of difference. The truth is that *with or without a disputed passage or word, no basic teaching of the Bible would be changed.*

Philip Schaff, after an exhaustive comparison, discovered that not one of the variations altered "an article of faith or a precept of duty which is not abundantly sustained by other and undoubted passages, or by the whole tenor of Scripture

teaching.” (Philip Schaff, *Companion to the Greek New Testament and the English Version*. Rev. ed. New York: Harper Brothers, 1883, p. 177)

So the truth is, you don't need to depend on disputed words in order to know the truth of the Bible's message on any topic.

In any case, when you learn how the variations are counted, you realize how invalid the critic's assertion is.

### ***How are manuscript variations counted?***

Geisler and Nix have put it well:

There is an ambiguity in saying there are some 200,000 variants in the existing manuscripts of the New Testament, since these represent only 10,000 places in the New Testament. If one single word is misspelled in 3,000 different manuscripts, this is counted as 3,000 variants or readings. (Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1968, p. 361)

That changes the picture, don't you think?

Again, he states:

Mathematically this would compute to a text that is 98.33 percent pure. (*Ibid.*, p. 365)

### ***Virtually no variation***

What this amounts to is that the great majority of the New Testament “has been transmitted to us with no, or next to no, variation.” (Benjamin B. Warfield, *Introduction to textual Criticism of the New Testament*. Seventh edition. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907, p. 14)

### ***No need to guess***

Or as another researcher states it, we “possess so many MSS, and we are aided by so many versions, that we are never left to the need of conjecture as the means of removing errata.” (Tregelles, *Greek New Testament*, “Protegomena,” P.X.)

### ***No doubtful passages***

Sir Frederic Kenyon is one of the great authorities in the field of New Testament textual criticism. Here’s his verdict:

No fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading...

It cannot be too strongly asserted that in substance the text of the Bible is certain: Especially is this the case with the New Testament. The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, or early translations from it, and of quotations from it in the earliest writers of the Church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities. ***This can be said of no other ancient book of the world.***

Scholars are satisfied that they possess substantially the true text of the principal Greek and Roman writers whose works have come down to us, of Sophocles, of Thucydides, of Cicero, of Virgil; yet our knowledge of their writings depends on a mere handful of manuscripts, whereas the manuscripts of the New Testament are counted by hundreds, and even thousands.” (Frederic G. Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941, p. 23)

## ***Comparison with other ancient writings***

Let's compare the *Iliad* of Homer and the national epic of India, the *Mahabharata*, with the New Testament.

- \* *Iliad* - has about 15,600 lines. Lines in doubt: 764.  
5% textual corruption.
- \* *Mahabharata* – some 250,000 lines. Lines in doubt: 26,000.  
10% textual corruption.
- \* *New Testament* – c. 20,000 lines. Lines in doubt: 40.  
½% textual corruption.

So then, how does the New Testament compare?

### ***98.33 percent pure***

You might say that it boils down to four things:

1. The New Testament's reliability is far greater than that of any other record of antiquity.
2. Most variants in New Testament manuscripts are merely in spelling or style.
3. We possess so many manuscripts, that, in removing any errors, we need never guess. The great majority of the New Testament has been transmitted to us with no, or next to no, variation. As Sir Frederic Kenyon puts it: "...no unbiased scholar would deny that the text that has come down to us is substantially sound." (Frederic G. Kenyon, *The Bible and Modern Scholarship*. London: John Murray, 1948, p.20)
4. No basic teaching of the New Testament rests on a disputed reading. In substance, the text of the Bible is certain.

If you still think the original New Testament message has not been faithfully preserved, I have a bridge to sell you in Brooklyn.

This Traditional Text, as we saw earlier, is supported by church fathers of the first century. Cross checking with their early quotations assures us that the English King James Bible we have today comes from manuscripts that have not changed in almost 2,000 years.

***You can believe that  
what we have is authentic***

An important check on the authenticity of the New Testament is in its treatment of the heroes. The history of Peter is a good example. We know more about him than about any other early follower of Jesus.

Many of the facts recorded about him are of a kind which mere adulators would not have reported, still less have invented. They stick out from the narrative by their sheer awkwardness, their uncompromising fidelity to truth.

Take, for example, Jesus' rebuke to Peter when they were wandering in the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi: "Get thee behind me Satan, for thou savourest not the things that be of God."

Then there is Peter's cowardly denial of Jesus in the outer court of the High Priest's house.

How can one explain this humiliating story appearing in an admittedly pro-Christian document, bearing the name of one of Peter's friends?

If we need evidence of the high standard of veracity prevailing in the early Christian movement we have it here in its most convincing form.

The record was not rewritten or tampered with, to make its cause look good. It tells it like it is. That's honesty.

## **PART 5**

# **WHAT ABOUT THE NON-BIBLICAL GOSPELS?**



# 16

## Do critics fabricate their case upon imaginary books?

My little boy was fond of imagining things that weren't there... flying cows, bogey-men and so on. You know kids! But since he grew up, he recognizes that these were just childhood fantasies. I think many of us have been through that stage.

But for some good folk, even after they have grown up, fantasies continue. In this chapter we are going to take a look at some imaginary documents dreamed up by some adults. You should find this interesting.

***It is claimed:*** The New Testament does not give the true version of Jesus. Some hidden documents, the 'secret gospels', which are older than the New Testament, reveal a different Jesus who was not a God-man and who did not rise from the dead. There are the 'Q' document, the Gospel of Thomas and the Secret Book of Mark, for example.

***In reality:*** Just ask the critic: "Have you seen this 'Q' document?"

If he is honest, he will reply, "No."

**YOU ASK:** Has anyone else seen it?

**THE CRITIC REPLIES:** No.

**YOU:** Then where is it?

**CRITIC:** No one knows.

**YOU:** So how on earth do you know it exists?

**CRITIC:** Well, it's like this. They (some other critics) looked in the Bible, at Matthew's Gospel and Luke's Gospel. And they saw that certain long sections were similar. So they decided that both Matthew and Luke must have been using some other common scroll, from which they had both copied their material. The point is that neither Matthew or Luke mention Jesus' death and resurrection, in that common passage they share.

**YOU:** So these modern scholars accepted the material that Matthew and Luke both *share* (which deal with topics other than the resurrection) But they rejected *everything else* Matthew and Luke said (which includes their record of the resurrection)?

**CRITIC:** Yes.

**YOU:** Yet no such 'Q' scroll has ever been found?

**CRITIC:** No.

**YOU:** And no ancient writer speaks of the 'Q' document?

There may follow an embarrassing pause. Then:

**CRITIC:** No.

**YOU:** Then as far as anyone on earth knows this 'Q' scroll doesn't exist. So these scholars guessed it into existence. Then they called it 'Q'. Then they reasoned that this 'Q' is older than Matthew or Luke... in fact, the earliest Christian writing?

**CRITIC:** Well, yes.

**YOU:** So you're telling me that these scholars took these extracted verses from Matthew and Luke - and in their minds

made them into an imaginary new book, called 'Q'. Then from this they made up their own new picture of Jesus?

And because this imaginary 'Q' that no one's ever seen, doesn't talk about Jesus' death and resurrection, then it must be older than the Bible. And because your Gospel of Thomas, like 'Q', doesn't mention Jesus' death and resurrection, then it also must be older?

**CRITIC:** That's it. No resurrection mentioned. That's the way to understand who Jesus was... just human.

**YOU:** Interesting. But I see two major problems.

**CRITIC:** Huh?

**YOU:** Well, firstly, no one on Planet Earth has ever seen 'Q'. Evidence for it is zilch. Let's face it. This is *an imaginary book* that exists purely in someone's head. No manuscript named 'Q' has been found in Egypt ... or anywhere else.

**CRITIC:** You could call it a hypothetical book.

**YOU:** Like that other non-existent book you call Secret Mark... and Alice's Wonderland?

Stunned silence (probably).

**YOU:** Very well, let's think about something solid, like the pyramids... 4,000 years old. Just suppose we could turn the Cheops pyramid upside down and balance its enormous weight on one small stone slab. Tell me, how long would it stand before it toppled of its own weight? A day or two?

**CRITIC:** You'd be silly to try.

**YOU:** Exactly. But this is what you and I are being asked to believe about 'Q'. Someone has just turned upside down the 2,000 year structure of documented history. And balanced it on one imaginary document no one has ever seen!

Now look, I hate to be a spoil sport, you'll eventually have to face the truth. You are never going to find 'Q'. The chance of that happening is about one in 20 zillion zillion.

Not only are you never going to find 'Q', but you may have to live the rest of your life watching your fellow critics lick the egg off their faces, for making such a fanciful claim.

In reality, there is no need for 'Q' to exist at all.

**CRITIC:** What are you getting at?

**YOU:** You see, there's a very simple explanation for the material Matthew and Luke share. Luke himself, at the beginning of his book, refers to witnesses. He says he used material from these witnesses (Luke 1:1,2) – one of whom was Matthew, whom he knew to be a faithful witness about certain things. There it is, from the horse's mouth.

**CRITIC:** Did Luke say that?

**YOU:** Tell me, isn't the simplest and most ordinary explanation usually the correct one?

Interestingly, every supposed word of 'Q' is found right in the New Testament itself. Every word. Speculation about other supposed parts of 'Q' that are lost is pure guesswork. In fact, there is no proof that anything is lost... nor that 'Q' even existed.

***Which came first – the “secret gospels” or the New Testament?***

**CRITIC:** What I’m basically saying is that two versions of Christianity developed alongside each other. The Gnostics started Christianity, then the New Testament writers came along and hijacked it with their own version.

**YOU:** But with no ‘Q’ document, what evidence do you have?

**CRITIC:** There’s the Gospel of Thomas, dating say, to 50 to 60 AD. That’s older than the New Testament Gospels. \*

**YOU:** Why older?

**CRITIC:** Because it agrees with ‘Q’. Like ‘Q’ it doesn’t mention Jesus’ resurrection – which was a later invention.

**YOU:** You mean to say it’s *older* because it agrees with a *non-existent* book? ...a phantom book that doesn’t exist?

**CRITIC:** My point is, this Thomas book does not mention Jesus’ godhead or resurrection.

**YOU:** That’s true. But, just because someone doesn’t write about something does that prove they are ignorant of it?

**CRITIC:** Well, no. But, you see, the Thomas book told the real truth about Jesus... no godhead, no resurrection. So when the church began saying Jesus was a God who rose from the dead, they had to get rid of this Thomas book – take it out of the Bible.

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\* We have shown that Matthew’s and Mark’s Gospel were written as early as 37 AD and 45 AD respectively. See pp. 63-70.

**YOU:** Would you give me some evidence that this happened?

**CRITIC:** Well...er...er...

**YOU:** Okay, here are some real facts. That little dialogue termed 'Gospel of Thomas' never seems to have made it into anyone's Bible. Not even the Gnostics at Nag Hammadi where it was found put it in with the New Testament books. No one did. The idea that this so-called 'Gospel of Thomas' was somehow 'taken out' of the Bible is just a myth. There's not an atom of evidence for it.

**CRITIC:** You must admit, a 'Gospel of Thomas' is mentioned by some early church fathers.

**YOU:** Oh, yes. But never as a legitimate part of the Bible. And when they do quote from it, do you know, it is from a totally different text from your 'Thomas' found in the fifth century 'library' at Nag Hammadi. The text quoted by the early Christian writers is about the childhood of Jesus. This 'Infancy Gospel of Thomas', as it is now called, has no connection in subject, style or viewpoint with this other book, your book of Thomas, from Nag Hammadi.

Even if your Thomas book were genuine and as early as the Crucifixion date itself (which it is not), it is a brief, confused dialogue from an un-stated time and place. It's of little value for historical purposes. It contains no reference to the actual life of Jesus. Just a few rambling questions and answers. Hardly a chapter's worth of text.

In fact, if we didn't already know about Jesus, this so-called Gospel of Thomas would be a real puzzle. It never explains who these people are, when they lived, or why we should care about this very strange discussion they are having, with its bizarre half-quotations from the four Gospels.

Its dialogue is so ill-defined that without the New Testament as a background, it could have been attributed to some obscure ancient Gnostic sect whose ideas apparently never got far. In fact, if the text of 'Thomas' had not borrowed the names of Jesus and a few apostles, it would be recognized as just another piece of mysterious Gnostic philosophy and treated like the other Gnostic writings that were found with it.

Think about this. If the Gnostics could have stood on their own, they would not have ever needed to wrap themselves up in the authority of the New Testament by pretending to have been part of it.

Do you ever see Christian books pretending to be part of some Gnostic tradition? Of course not. Take John, for example. Although his style of writing might sound something like that of the Gnostics, he went out of his way in his letters to condemn the Gnostics - so that no one would have any grounds for misidentifying him.

Tell me this. Why is it that every heretic and Gnostic in the early Christian centuries was trying to use the New Testament to boost his authority - yet not one of them ever cited 'Thomas' or other Gnostic writings as their authority?

If the New Testament was written later and was less reliable than 'Thomas', why didn't anyone cite 'Thomas' instead?

*... continued in the next chapter.*

# 17

## When were these “other” books written?

Now, let's notice a few other facts about this book of Thomas.

### **1. All scrolls found with Thomas have late dates**

Let's ask ourselves. Why is it that of all the other scrolls dug up with the book of Thomas, *not one of them* has ever been *dated early* as the critic claims for Thomas? Evidently, this cannot be done, or else some critic would have tried it.

### **2. Earliest papyri that quote Thomas = fourth century**

The few pieces of papyri that quote this Thomas book cannot with certainty be dated earlier than around the start of the fourth century. These come from some fragments found at Oxyrinchus in Egypt. Again, while some would like to speculate about Thomas being from the first century, there exists no particle of proof. That claim is pure fiction.

The truth is, there are no quotations from the book of Thomas in any early authors or datable fragments. This makes Thomas a relatively late text compared to the four New Testament Gospels.

### **3. No ancient writers valued the Thomas book**

From all available evidence, nobody took Thomas seriously. Even the Nag Hammadi Library bound it together with the pagan *Republic of Plato*, but not with any New Testament books.

In the light of the above facts, Thomas' non-mention of Jesus' Godhead or resurrection is worthless, from an historical point of view.

And, sadly for the critic, the claim of an 'early' date for a 'Gnostic-style' human-only Jesus stands or falls with that Gospel of Thomas.

### ***So how old is Thomas?***

Thomas and the other Nag Hammadi scrolls date to AD 150 or even later. That's when Gnosticism began to flourish.

In this same Nag Hammadi collection, the Gospel of Philip (along with the Gospel of Mary) is at the very earliest, dated around **AD 175**. (Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1987, p.69) Or worse, as the official translator of the Gospel of Philip suggests, about **AD 250!** (James L. Garlow and Peter Jones, *Cracking Da Vinci's Code*. New York: Doubleday, 2003, p. 186) Still other scholars date it from about **AD 350**. (*The Record*, Warburton, Australia, May 20, 2006, p. 5)

Some of these other imagined 'earlier gospels' actually *quote from the New Testament Gospels*. That of itself shows they were written later.

That's right. The Christian chicken came *before* the Gnostic egg. The critics have a history of not getting things quite right.

The so-called Gospel of Judas is another book reflecting themes that are consistent with Gnostic traditions – novel ideas that were multiplying from the second century onward.

### ***Marcion, second century forerunner of Gnostics***

There's something you should know about those Gnostic gospels so-called, which include the book of Thomas.

In the first century, some New Testament prophecies were being circulated throughout the Roman Empire warning that “false teachers” were coming, generally of a Gnostic kind. (See Colossians 2:16-19; 1 Timothy 4:1; Acts 20:29-30; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 2:18-19)

And history shows that these predictions began to come true in the middle of the second century.

Around AD 140, Marcion, a church leader from Pontus, in what is now Turkey, had been censured for adultery. So how did he respond? He repudiated the idea of marriage and childbearing and declared the Old Testament and its laws out of date. Then in AD 144, he went to Rome, set up an alternative community, and allowed into it only single people – a recipe for eventual extinction, you might say.

Quite simply, Marcion denied the essentials of Christianity. He even created his own Bible! This comprised the Gospel of Luke and ten of Paul’s letters, all of them “cleansed” of Old Testament influences.

Yet Marcion acknowledged that the books he rejected or modified were accepted by the Church. He also acknowledged that they had been written by the early apostles (in the first century).

Marcion had been expelled from the Church, so he had every reason to say the worst of it. If there were any forgeries in the alleged writings of the apostles, he had a grand opportunity to discover – and expose - them.

He traveled through all the countries and cities where the apostles had preached, and to where their writings had been sent. And he never found one single person who suggested to him that the New Testament writings were not genuine. ***Marcion knew that they were written by the men who claimed to write them.*** However, Marcion believed his theology was right and that of the apostles was wrong.

Polycarp, who lived from AD 69 to 155, had been a personal friend of the apostle John. When Polycarp met Marcion, he called him ‘the first-born of Satan’. (James Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. New York: Harper and Row, 1977)

This ‘first-born of Satan’ – a wayward Christian - was among the first of the Gnostics. Historians call Marcion a “proto-Gnostic”, because his system was not nearly as developed as those that emerged later to produce the kind of literature discovered in Nag Hammadi, like the Gospel of Thomas.

As it turned out, the Gospel of Truth, the Gospel of Thomas, and so on, were among these Gnostic books that developed *after* Marcion’s time.

It is worth noting that Marcion did not cite the Gospel of Truth or the Gospel of Thomas. Had these books existed, Marcion could have based his whole argument on this so-called original teaching of Jesus. These books would have fitted so perfectly with what Marcion taught.

As you see, the crucial factor is timing.

So, then, what does the *hard evidence* show about timing?:

1. The New Testament Gospels were written quite early in the first century, between *AD 40 and 70*.
2. The so called ‘hidden gospels’ of the Gnostics did not develop until *AD 150 to 350*.

Gnosticism was *a reaction* to the Christian message. And it was cemented by its own writings.

### ***The challenge***

The issue is really quite simple. Was Jesus God? Was he crucified? Did he rise from the dead?

1. *Yes*, say first century eyewitnesses.
2. *No*, say second century Gnostics and their 21<sup>st</sup> century disciples.

To suggest that these Gnostic Gospels, written 100 to 300 years after the time of Jesus, are a more accurate account of his life, is fanciful.

Both pagan critics and early Christian writers haggle over the same passages in the same books in the same New Testament. Yet, significantly, there is no debate concerning the Gospel of Thomas, nor any other Gnostic book. Pagan writers showed no interest in them at all. Their attention was focused totally on the New Testament text.

Why didn't the pagan critics take seriously these silly Gnostic books which some modern scholars now think so important?

Modern researcher Alof Hage asks some questions that demand an answer:

You'd think our modern critics would be embarrassed by the lack of interest their pagan forebears show these odd Gnostic ravings. How can it be the pagans knew so much of the New Testament and so little of these other texts? Did the pagans ignore the Gnostics because they were so few compared to the New Testament-toting Christians? Were the Gnostics a minor theological backwater not worth the time of pagan critics? It certainly seems our scholars have greatly inflated the importance of the Gnostics and their writings. (Alof Hage, <<http://www.thetimequest.com>>)

If it wasn't for Christian writings, we would never know what the Gnostic writers were going on about – let alone who the Gnostics themselves even were. The pagans totally ignore these marginal heretics.

## ***Lying “scholars”***

Why is it that some modern scholars just can't tell fact from fiction?

Most of the proofs they offer are unconvincing and nonexistent, except for quotations from one another and other similar-minded critics.

Starting from an anti-supernatural bias, they have turned the quest for the historical Jesus into a powerless piece of fiction.

According to this novel approach, the elusive 'Q' and 'Secret Mark' and Thomas (with a few others from the second century, which disagree among themselves) have the true blue story - and the 5,686 Greek New Testament manuscripts you can toss out the door.

Just imagine a sports stadium containing 5,686 people. Of these, 5,636 are in harmony, agreeing with one another and enjoying the game. But there are also 50 other people. These are not like the first. They dislike the crowd around them and slander their words when they can. But they have another problem: they also disagree with each other.

Which group would you rather listen to? The one with people in one accord, or the one that is filled with discord? The one that knows what it is saying, or the one that cannot agree on what they want to say?

Whose word would you trust? Isn't the answer obvious?

**CRITIC:** Well, the *Dead Sea Scrolls* also show Jesus to be merely human. What do you say to that?"

**YOU:** Nice try. It is true that in the scrolls is mention of somebody termed the Teacher of Righteousness and another

person called the Wicked Priest. The former man founded the Essene sect.

However, these terms are code names for persons unknown. There is no proven connection with Jesus Christ or with any other identifiable person. Another unfortunate foul up.

### ***Who is more likely to know?***

Let's inject a bit of common sense into the picture. These critical scholars are *centuries removed* from the Jesus they speak about. But those who wrote the New Testament bore testimony *close to the events*.

So who is more likely to know the truth? A number of eyewitnesses, reporting independently of each other... or biased, faulty scholars living 2,000 years later?

If your life depended on it, who would you consider it safer to trust?

Now come these critical scholars, a bunch of opinionated and self-appointed experts, claiming that Jesus' real mission was misunderstood and represented by his followers.

So now have been born these 21<sup>st</sup> century experts who can read between the lines of the old texts.

It's sad. The evidence shows they are unable to read in a meaningful sense the lines themselves.

May I ask the critic, Why do you claim to see fern-seed yet you can't see an elephant ten meters away in broad daylight?

We have testimony of those who say they *met* Jesus... *ate* with him... *worked* with him. And that after he arose from the dead, he cooked a meal for them, and they touched, and ate with him,

for six weeks... hundreds of people! Can you do better than that?

Almost 2,000 years ago, real men with dirt under their fingernails met a real Jesus who challenged them to follow him. Real women and real children also met and followed this Jesus. Then many of them lost their lives for refusing to recant testimony of what this Jesus had done and said when he was with them.

Unless you can prove the New Testament writers are lying, your own integrity is at stake if you refuse to believe their testimony.

It is time to face the truth: The weight of evidence is against the critic. It will not sustain his eccentric pictures of Jesus that around Easter every year attract widespread media attention because of their novelty. Every attempt to reconstruct a fictive Jesus remains a play of subjective imagination.

And with that in mind, let's meet an interesting bunch of scholars called the Jesus Seminar...



## **PART 6**

# **THE JESUS SEMINAR**



# 18

## The quest for a fictitious Jesus

The Jesus Seminar was co-founded by Robert Funk and John Dominic Crossan. Funk describes it as “a group of scholars who meet regularly to assess the authenticity of the words and acts of Jesus in the Gospels.”(Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996, dustjacket)

One may agree, there is nothing wrong with honest skepticism. As a former skeptic on certain issues I can easily relate to Mr Funk and his colleagues in their search for answers.

So when the Jesus Seminar (JS) invites us to rate their scholarly opinion as more trustworthy than the ancient biblical documents, my interest is aroused.

Mr Funk’s aim is to get YOU off the Bible as final authority and onto HIM as final authority. In essence he says, “I don’t want YOU to trust in the Bible, but in ME and my group.”

This should be no problem if his group builds its thesis upon rock solid evidence. As the historian Philip Schaff says:

The purpose of the historian is not to construct a history from preconceived notions and adjust it to his own liking, but to reproduce it from the best evidence and to let it speak for itself. (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, reprint ed. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1962, Vol. I, p. 175)

With this in mind, I began reading Funk’s book, *Honest to Jesus*. It proved to be interesting reading. However, it wasn’t long before a few things started to bother me.

### ***The critic's uncertainty***

One was the uncertainty of Mr Funk's speculations. Here are a few examples:

\* Where the Bible says Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1), Jesus was "***probably*** born in Nazareth." (Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996, p. 33)

\* When the Bible says that Jesus stood up to read in the synagogue. (Luke 4:16) JS says this "***may well be*** a fiction invented by Luke." (*Ibid.*)

\* Again, "Judas Iscariot the betrayer is ***in all probability*** a gospel ***fiction***. It is difficult to determine what his role as betrayer might have been..." (*Ibid.*, p. 234)

\* Blind Bartimaeus... and Jairus... are ***probably also inventions***." (p. 235)

\* I noticed, however, that Funk's Jesus Seminar group graciously allowed some other passages to be correct. "Elizabeth was ***probably*** the name of John's [the Baptist's] mother. Luke describes John as a spirit-filled desert ascetic; ***we think that is accurate***. John... was ***probably*** executed by Herod Antipas." (p. 295)

You will notice the frequent use of "probably"... "may well be"... "in all probability"... "we think that"...

This uncertainty sounded alarm bells.

Nevertheless, there was one thing of which these guys were sure: that the New Testament writers had been mistaken about Jesus Christ. Thus, while Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Paul insisted that they were faithfully recording Jesus' sayings, the JS group was saying, No! Those early Christians "***imagined*** things for him to say – things that gave voice to their own beliefs.... less than 20 percent of the words attributed to Jesus in the gospels were actually spoken by him." (Funk, "Opening Remarks," *Foundations and Facets Forum* 1, no. 1, March 1985, p. 41)

In fact, the JS group was telling us that:

- \* Jesus “may have eaten a last meal with the inner circle of his followers, but **he did not** initiate what we know as the eucharist [or the Lord’s Supper].” It did not originate with him. (p. 42)
- \* “Pilate **did not** wash his hands **nor did** Judeans accept responsibility for Jesus’ death.... The account of those events in Matthew is a piece of Christian **fiction**” (p. 221)
- \* The story in John concerning Peter’s repeated denial of Jesus at his trial **is “embellished”** with “legendary accretions”, “**fictional** details”. (p. 230)
- \* “The guard at the tomb is a Christian **fiction**.... The dream of Pilate’s wife is undoubtedly a Matthean **invention**.” (p. 236)
- \* “The great commission, as it has been termed [given by Jesus, says Matthew] was of course composed by Matthew. It **does not stem from Jesus**.” (p. 261)
- \* The “lists and reports [of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances] were **compiled long after** the fact and are therefore **not reliable**.” (267)
- \* “We can be certain that Mary **did not** conceive Jesus without the assistance of human male sperm.” (p. 294)
- \* “Barabbas... in Mark 15:7 is **certainly a fiction**, as is Simon of Cyrene.... (p. 235)

You’ll probably agree that these are serious charges.

On the one hand, we see the New Testament writers insisting that their reports are “eyewitness” testimony of Jesus. On the other hand, JS is charging that all those men were either untruthful or mistaken. Pondering on these statements, my hopes were raised that surely the JS group would produce evidence in support of their charges? I continued to read on, with expectation.

It soon became evident that this theory, despite its appearance of rationality, had some peculiar weaknesses. There were awkward pieces that just wouldn’t fit. By the end of Funk’s presentation, seven of these were nagging at me. Would you like to know what these were?

## **1. A WRONG MOTIVE**

You will recall the aim of an honest historian:

The purpose of the historian is not to construct a history from preconceived notions and adjust it to his own liking, but to reproduce it from the best evidence and to let it speak for itself. . (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, reprint ed. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1962, Vol. I, p. 175)

I submit it with respect. The Jesus Seminar group began to slip here. Their stated aim was to *create a new 'fictive' Jesus* to fit modern man. (Funk, "Opening Remarks," *Foundations and Facets Forum*, 1, no. 1, March 1985, p.12)

These dear men brought this pre-decided motive to their project. Unfortunately, this motive became an impediment. How? It hampered their ability to accept the Gospel writings at face value.

## **2. WRONG ASSUMPTIONS: Unjustified anti-supernaturalism**

They bring to their 'unbiased' study the assumption that there is no supernatural playing a role in the matter, that miracles are impossible, and then construct their decisions upon that unproven assumption.

It must be freely admitted that we do read in the Gospels of some astonishing happenings. And one may be tempted to ask, could the writers have been exaggerating?

So let's think clearly here. This calls for unbiased thinking.

On one hand, it may be contended that miracles cannot exist, since they would be in violation of the laws of nature. This argument *assumes* that natural law is a closed system – that it cannot be acted on from the outside.

On the other hand, if a Creator really does exist, natural law is not a closed system. Therefore, a miracle is not necessarily a violation of natural law.

Whether one accepts miracles as such depends upon one's attitude concerning the existence of God.

If one accepts the reality of a Superior Being, might not miracles make sense? What we might call "supernatural" could be perfectly natural to a Superior Being, quite natural to His power. If He created laws of nature, might He not control, or override such laws - using even natural phenomena in a "supernatural" way?

Consider, for example, a virgin birth. C.S. Lewis raises this valid point:

If God creates a miraculous spermatozoon in the body of a virgin, it does not proceed to break any laws. The laws at once take over. Nature is ready. Pregnancy follows, according to all the normal laws, and nine months later a child is born. (C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*. New York: Macmillan, 1960, p. 59)

In this case, the event which we call a miracle was brought on not by the suspension of the laws in ordinary operation, but by the super addition of something not ordinarily in operation.

The testimony for regularity in *general* is in no way testimony against an unusual event in *particular*.

Based on past observation, sometimes the "odds" against an event are high. But the evidence for the event is otherwise very good (based on current observation or reliable testimony).

Let's consider, for example, the biblical account of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Bernard Ramm observes:

If the raising of Lazarus was actually witnessed by John and recorded faithfully by him when still in

soundness of faculties and memory, for purposes of evidence it is the same as if we were there and saw it. (Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Christian Evidences*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1953, pp. 140-141)

Could it be, therefore, that the reason the Christian movement came to believe in certain unusual events connected with Jesus was simply that these did as a matter of fact occur?

It becomes apparent that the Bible does not meet Mr Funk's ideas of how it should be, and Mr Funk interprets this as a fault with the Bible!

Let's face it. The radical conclusions of his group of critics are based on presuppositions that are unproven.

One sees in their reasoning an *unsubstantiated bias* against the supernatural. This leads them to reject any miraculous intervention in history by the Creator.

The best they can offer is negative criticism.

"If it's miraculous, it's unhistorical" is the unproven assumption they bring to the text.

Typical of the Jesus Seminar's speculative minds is that of its cofounder John Dominic Crossan. We are imaginatively told by Mr Crossan that Jesus was buried in a shallow grave, dug up by dogs and eaten. (See Richard N. Ostling, "Jesus Christ, Plain and Simple," *Time*, January 10, 1994, pp. 32-33)

And he said it all by himself. Evidence? Don't ask.

### **3. WRONG METHODOLOGY**

Similarly, most of the proofs these men offer in their revolt against history are unconvincing and often nonexistent, usually quotations from one another and like-minded liberal critics.

This steers them into the wrong procedure for their voting. The JS group attempts to determine truth by *majority* vote of its own members.

And how reliable is majority vote? You know the answer to that. Didn't the majority once believe the earth was flat?

So what would be the correct procedure? Simply this: to supply as far as possible direct contemporary evidence. There is also a mass of other data. There are other ancient writings, the old martyrologies and menologies, the age-old parchments that have reposed in great libraries for many centuries, filed away, then forgotten. These sources, and the works of eminent scholars who have explored the great scrolls, and deciphered their contents, reveal astonishing facts. The Jesus Seminar crew could benefit from these.

Were they aware of them, their speculations might never have got off the ground.

#### **4. WRONG BOOKS**

They base their voting on the wrong books. Just follow this carefully. You will see a neat little trick being played here.

Firstly, they start with the assumption that the supernatural plays no part in human affairs. Therefore Jesus' bodily resurrection never really happened.

Then, in support of this, some big guns are brought out: a book called 'Q', another book which they call Secret Mark, and a so-called Gospel of Thomas. And behold... these don't mention Jesus as a God-man rising from the dead. So, hey presto! They must be the earliest Jesus Gospels, written before that resurrection myth developed. (Funk, pp.38,117,125)

***In reality:*** To their credit, Thomas does exist... but from the second century. And we have seen the impressive attempt to

create their imaginary ‘Q’ and ‘Secret Mark’. How sad that this is contrary to overwhelming evidence!

### **5. WRONG DATES: *Unfounded acceptance of late dates***

Then they use the wrong dates. They first assume that the supernatural events of Jesus’ life must have been inserted into the Gospels *later*, after the true facts were forgotten.

To support this first assumption they must then invent a second assumption: that the Gospels were written very late - Mark 70 to 80 AD, Matthew and Luke 80 to 100 AD, and John not until the first half of the second century. (Funk, pp. 38,256) That’s right. Another ASSUMPTION.

First, the Jesus Seminar’s Mr Funk has accepted the theoretical assumption of no supernatural. Therefore supernatural elements in the Gospels could not have been written by eyewitness, but invented later. Then he has convinced himself that anything which contradicts his speculations must be wrong.

Unfortunately, these assumptions go against manuscript evidence.

As we have already discovered, evidence beyond reasonable doubt shows the New Testament books to have been written much earlier: *Matthew’s* Hebraisms suit the earliest period of Christianity; there is evidence dating *Mark* as early as 45 to 50 AD; *Paul’s* letters 48-65; *Luke’s* Gospel before the early 60s; *Luke’s* book of Acts by 62 AD; and *John* before 70.

*Matthew’s* nativity account and miraculous birth report cannot have been a late development, because Matthew wrote FIRST. And his date of writing allows no time for a myth to gradually develop. Historians agree it takes about two generations, or eighty years, for legendary accounts to establish themselves.

# 19

## Resurrection or only a vision?

Two bright young men — avowed skeptics — went up to Oxford. One was the eminent Gilbert West, and the other was Lord Lyttleton, the famous English journalist.

These two men agreed that Christianity must be destroyed. They also agreed that to destroy it, two things were necessary:

1. — They must prove that Jesus never rose from the tomb.
2. — They must prove that Saul of Tarsus was never converted to Christianity.

Now they divided the task between them, West assuming the responsibility for the RESURRECTION, and Lyttleton and his great mind, caring for the EXPERIENCE OF SAUL on the Damascus road.

They were to give themselves plenty of time - twelve months or more, if necessary.

The two skeptics, West and Lyttleton, met again as planned. Each was a little sheepish, as he approached the other. Each was apprehensive of what the other's reaction would be.

For when they compared notes, it was realized that they had both come independently to disturbing conclusions.

Here is what each now claimed. West had found the evidence pointed unmistakably to the fact that Jesus did rise from the dead. Lyttleton had found, on examination, that Saul of Tarsus did become a radically new man, through his conversion to Christianity.

Both men had become, in the process, strong and devoted followers of Jesus. Each had experienced a remarkable change in his life, which each claimed had occurred through contact with the risen Messiah.

We may well ask, What caused this dramatic, totally unexpected change? Well, would you like to know?

Of course you can ask the Jesus Seminar if Jesus really rose from the dead and they'll say no. But let's allow them to them speak for themselves:

***It is claimed:*** The idea of Jesus having “risen” from the dead only “began as a series of visions.” (Funk, p. 40) It was real only in the disciples’ minds. (Funk, p. 257) As time rolls on and the tradition matures, the appearances of Jesus tend to become more physical and tangible and to be linked to the empty tomb story. (Funk, p. 268) That is, the idea of a physical corpse rising is a later development only.

### ***Were Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances just visions?***

Well, is it possible that these alleged appearances of Jesus after Jesus’ death were only a vision, resulting from a fervent desire in the hearts of the disciples?

Those disciples were very reluctant to believe he had risen again, according to the records. So they scattered to different areas to forget it, to fishing or some other humble way of life. (John 21:3)

Unfortunately, there is a problem with the vision theory. The disciples ***did not believe he would rise***. They ***doubted*** that he had risen. They called it an “idle tale”. (Matthew 28:17; Luke 24:10,11)

They did not even WANT to believe he had risen! (Luke 24:13-31)

All the way through the Gospel accounts, the writers themselves attest to a very great *reluctance* on the part of his closest disciples to *believe* in his resurrection.

It was crystal clear that the disciples of Jesus DID NOT BELIEVE the resurrection of Jesus until they simply HAD to believe it.

Jesus' followers were caused to believe against their wills. They arrived at this conviction very slowly – a conviction to which only the inexorable logic of facts led them. His first appearance, so far from meeting their anticipations, startled them – until Jesus reassured them, invited them to touch him, “for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me having.”

Do men “conjure up” a vague or nebulous dream in something they are “hoping for”, if they really *are not even hoping* for it? Would they have an ecstatic “vision” of something they *didn't believe would occur* in the first place?

Of course not!

Paul (first known as Saul) was a Pharisee determined to stamp out Christianity that was infecting Judaism.

Saul was well educated. His logical mind would not be readily deceived. Yet he gave testimony of his meeting the resurrected Jesus on the way to Damascus - while he was an ardent unbeliever. That meeting turned his life around.

So fierce was Saul's attack upon devotees of the new Christian movement, that he wrought havoc within the church at Jerusalem.

Even the boundaries of his own Judea could not confine him. When he trespassed into their territory to hound the followers of Jesus, the Romans did not restrain him. They probably felt Saul was doing them a service in ridding them of this undesirable religious plague.

However, this reign of terror by Saul's Gestapo shocked even the hardened Romans. Saul's fury knew no bounds.

Whilst "breathing out threatenings and slaughter" against the followers of Jesus (Acts 9:1), this man was pulled up dramatically on one of his murderous errands, when Jesus appeared to him. It was not a mere vision. ***His fellow travelers actually heard the voice that spoke to Paul.*** (Acts 9:7) Saul was blind for three days after this incident.

Paul converted to Christianity. This conversion placed his life in danger. He fled to Arabia for safety for three years, where he was taught by Jesus what he was supposed to teach to the nations. (Galatians 1:11-20)

Later, he could say before King Agrippa, "For the king KNOWS of these things [of the resurrection of the dead], before whom also I speak freely, for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him, for ***this thing was not done in a corner.***" (Acts 26:26)

Only one explanation makes sense. All these people saw Jesus, the same Jesus. Alive again. They were all skeptical. They DID NOT BELIEVE his resurrection - until they simply HAD to believe it.

### ***Were they hallucinations?***

***Question:*** Could these alleged appearances of Jesus after Jesus' death been perhaps an hallucination?

***Answer:*** The hallucination theory is not plausible because it contradicts certain laws and principles to which psychiatrists say visions must conform.

The appearances did not follow the patterns that we know to be always present in visions.

1. Hallucinations are private.
2. They require of people an anticipating spirit of hopeful expectancy in which the hallucination functions as a sort of wish-fulfillment.
3. Hallucinations require a psychological preparation. One must so intensely want to believe that he projects something that really is not there and attaches reality to his imagination. For example, a mother who's son has died remembers how he used to come in through the door regularly at 6 o'clock. So in her rocking chair she sits musing. Suddenly she thinks she sees him come in, and converses with him. At that point she has lost contact with reality.
4. Hallucinations usually tend to recur over a long period of time with noticeable regularity.
5. The same vision does not keep occurring repeatedly to totally different people in widely separated areas at totally different times.
6. Hallucinations have never stimulated people to embark on a project of enormous magnitude, during which they live lives of rigid and consistent self-denial, even to suffer and die for it. No mere apparition of the senses ever yet moved the world.

However, the appearances of Jesus are very different.

### ***1. Accepted his death***

The disciples had no great difficulty in accepting Jesus' departure. It had been a good experience knowing him, but now that was over.

There was not a breath of hope for any future contact with him. That was all in the past. Full stop.

## **2. Put it behind them**

Their faith had been shaken by the catastrophe of his shameful death. Their hopes were so far shattered, that they decided to go back to their fishing. Recovery was very slow.

The faith of the disciples had *collapsed* after Jesus' death on the cross. (Luke 24:21,22; Mark 16:14)

Each was in abject fear for his own personal safety. At the trial, Peter cringed under the taunt of a maid.

They began their defection by denying Jesus, deserting him, flying in all directions, studiously concealing the fact of their former connection with him.

They were not only moved by *fear* to conceal themselves, but by *shame*. They were sorely mortified at having been led astray by him. Because they were *honest*, plain, sensible men. They had originally followed him because they saw in him that moral purity and truth, which formed the elements of their own characters.

They thought it had been 'nice' while it lasted, but now their leader had been martyred. And now it was all over.

## **3. Surprised by seeing him**

The appearances came as surprises. The disciples were intent on other things. There was no state of expectancy.

## **4. Not recognised as Jesus**

The hallucination theory also breaks down on the fact that on three separate occasions this "hallucination" was not immediately recognised as Jesus. (Luke 24:13-31; John 20:15; 21:4) When the women who came to the tomb to anoint the dead body

of Jesus, they mistook him at first for the gardener. When he first appeared to his disciples, they were afraid and thought they were seeing a ghost.

### ***5. Came to abrupt end***

The appearances of the risen body came to an abrupt end 6 weeks after Jesus' death – after a rather dramatic event in which he was seen to bodily ascend.

### ***6. Empowered them to shake world***

What they had seen and experienced with Jesus in those 6 weeks empowered them to “turn the world upside down.”

As we have noted, the faith of the disciples had *collapsed* after Jesus' death on the cross. Each was in great fear for his own personal safety. They began their defection by denying Jesus, deserting him and flying in all directions. They were not only moved by *fear* to conceal themselves, but by *shame*.

***To them, the whole thing was now over. And they were about to go their own way, back to their respective jobs and positions of earlier days, and give up the whole thing.***

They were very reluctant to believe he had risen again.

But what do we behold!!! Within just seven weeks after this, THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS IS MADE KNOWN BY THEM, THROUGH THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF THE LAND!

This is simply *not* how hallucinations work.

### ***Mass hypnotism?***

Just in case someone still has the thought that these alleged appearances of Jesus after Jesus' death were something like mass hypnotism, let's get this clear.

The appearances kept occurring to groups of people, and *totally different people* in *widely separated areas* at totally *different times*.

It could be neither mass hypnotism nor a dream.

The same dream does not repeatedly keep occurring to totally different people in widely separated areas at totally different times.

One actually finds twelve different occasions recorded when Jesus appeared after his resurrection. Is it likely that men of such diversity of character would all be deceived and deluded? One could hardly imagine Peter becoming delirious, or Thomas hysterical, or the group of 500 all simultaneously suffering from an hallucination.

### ***Or was it a hoax?***

So we can forget the hallucination or vision idea.

But suppose the whole thing was a hoax – deliberately made up to deceive people ... and they knew their claims were false?...

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# Was it a deliberate hoax?

A hoax?

Well, perhaps.

Except that that a few things sort of bother me about that idea. I'll share them with you. Then please tell me what you think.

Consider these ten factors:

### 1. ***Wouldn't someone eventually expose the hoax?***

Where can we find the daring sort of ringleader with the imagination to plan a *coup* like that and carry it through without detection? Even if it had been possible, sooner or later someone who knew the facts would have 'split'.

### 2. ***Can moral strength spring from a lie?***

You can also be sure of this. No great moral structure such as early Christianity, based as it was on lifelong persecution and personal suffering, could have risen upon a statement that its founders knew to be a lie.

### 3. ***Sudden psychological U-turn.***

Here are men whose faith had collapsed after Jesus' execution. Each was cowering in fear and hiding for his own personal safety. To them, the whole thing was now over.

But within just seven weeks they came suddenly *boldly forth*, full of confidence in Jesus... to do anything for him.

And of all places they came back to Jerusalem! ...to the very place from which they had fled! Now they walked everywhere with ANIMATED STEPS AND HEADS HIGH, like men no longer serving a defeated convict, but like men whose Master was Lord of heaven and earth.

Ask yourself. What caused this dramatic change, so that they went out enthusiastically announcing, *even at the risk of their lives*, that Jesus had risen?

Jesus' immediate followers who had seen him PUBLICLY executed and PUBLICLY buried, these same people had even WALKED and TALKED with him AFTER his resurrection.

These men had personal, real-life experiences of their own upon which to base their confidence.

Think of Stephen, the first recorded Christian martyr in Jerusalem. If he knew the resurrected Jesus to be just a deception, then explain the radiant joy on his face and the prayer upon his lips as he asked for the forgiveness of those who were about to murder him? (Acts 7:55-60)

I ask you, would numerous men be torn limb from limb, thrown to wild beasts, drawn and quartered, sawn in two, hung upside down, burnt at the stake - FOR SOMETHING THEY KNEW TO BE A HOAX?

Nothing, absolutely nothing, could withstand the testimony of Jesus' followers. What they said "turned the world upside down." When challenged, they replied simply, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (ch.4:20)

Peter, addressing a crowd only fifty days after the crucifixion, in the very same city where it had occurred, did not speak as a man who knew he was proclaiming a lie, but argued that Jesus' flesh had not suffered corruption (decay), because he had been raised bodily from the dead. (Acts 2:31-32)

That was the main theme of his gripping message.

#### ***4. All of them were changed***

This conviction spread to every single member of the Jesus party that we can trace. The whole party, including the nine men who fled at Jesus' arrest, and other independent persons that entered the event, were convinced that something had occurred which changed their entire outlook.

The clear evidence of history is that it did.

#### ***5. Went public where the facts could be checked.***

And their resurrection claims were first made not in some far-off place, but in Jerusalem – and they brought it here with inconceivable audacity into the intellectual center of the nation, where they could be disproved if wrong!

In Jerusalem, no illusions could prevail. Anyone could go out and see the tomb. Here an overwhelming body of official, authoritative and able investigators existed. Yet ***they won***. It was in this place of realism that no fewer than 3,000 converts were made in one day, increased shortly after to 5,000.

Within 20 years, their witness impressed itself upon every town of the eastern Mediterranean. In less than 50 years it had begun to threaten the peace of the Roman Empire.

#### ***6. Enemies were paralysed.***

We now need to explain not only the enthusiasm of Jesus' friends, but also the paralysis of his enemies and their inability to stop the growing stream of new converts.

Nobody could contradict the news. No one attempted to deny it. The report of Jesus' resurrection swept on, to close pagan temples, to cast down idols, to lift men into nobility, and bring

hope to a society in despair.

We behold here one of the biggest dislodgments of events in the world's history. This can only really be accounted for by an initial impact of colossal drive and power.

Rome reacted brutally. Tiberius issued an edict making it a capital offence to be a Christian. Claudius and other emperors reaffirmed the edict. As they noted with alarm the phenomenal growth of a movement which they considered a threat to the safety of the empire, they decided this was a class of people to be exterminated. History reveals a mass of blood-stained evidence, as they tried their hardest to crush Christianity. But it was like trying to push back the waves of the sea with your open hand.

Now here is the big question: Why could no one stop it – even with persecution? Only one thing makes sense. Behind all the attempts to stop it, there must have stood a silent, unanswerable fact, a fact which geography had made immovable.

If the body of Jesus still lay in the tomb where Joseph had placed it, why did they not say so? All they needed do to stop the Christian movement was to produce the body of Jesus and parade it through the streets.

### ***7. Hostile witnesses turned around***

Instead, some unlikely witnesses considered themselves compelled ultimately to join it.

(a) The record plainly says that James, the brother of Jesus, was cold and even hostile toward him during his living ministry. (Mark 6:3,4) His whole training and sympathies led him to incline toward the official and priestly view. So how did it come about that ultimately he is found in the inner circle and councils of the Christians? (Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book 20, chapter 9, section 1)

This is a conspicuously challenging and amazing turn-around.

(b) Saul from Tarsus, backed by the full power of the State, tried to smash the movement and was eventually engulfed by it. He became one its most powerful champions.

Convinced that the story wasn't true, Frank Morison started to write about Jesus' last days, the cross and the resurrection. However, as he studied this crucial period, something happened. Writing *Who Moved the Stone?* changed Morison's life. He wrote:

We might easily invent reasons why a man here or a woman there might have come under the spell of this extraordinary delusion. But the present case is different. In all this strange business of the culminative conversion of so many diverse and contrasted minds, there is a sense of something lurking in the background – some silent but unanswerable fact which brooked neither challenge nor mental doubt. (Frank Morison, *Who Moved the Stone?* Sparkford, U.K.: J.H. Haynes & Co., 2006, p. 148)

The resurrection of Jesus was a TALKED-OF, DISCUSSED, WELL-KNOWN EVENT that swept the entirety of the Roman empire in a short time.

Who could have believed (or would have believed) upon the dead Jesus as the Son of God, was there not compelling evidence for the resurrection?

I put it to you, that if Jesus had not risen from the dead, there would have been no Christianity — nor the New Testament writings.

### **8. *The 7 week delay has the ring of truth***

If this whole resurrection story was just made up, told and retold many years after the event, then why include the curious gap of 7 weeks between the event itself and its first public affirmation? Why wait 7 weeks, until people had begun to forget about the whole tragedy, and then suddenly spring their announcement upon the world? There does not seem any reason for it.

If this was only a legend, it would have made for a stronger tale to have placed the triumphant public announcement of the resurrection on the very day that its discovery was made. Retaining this strange, “weak link” element - the 7 week time lag between the alleged event and the proclamation of it, would lessen the impact of the story.

The most satisfactory answer to this dilemma is that such details were not part of a deliberately invented legend. Its very *defects as a legend* are the strongest proof of its actuality. We are here dealing not with legend, or romance, but with fact.

It has been said rightly, that the romancer can mould his incidents to fit his purpose, but the biographer must take what life gives him.

Jesus’ original followers did not wait two or three decades before giving their story to the world. They began their organized campaign within two months of the occurrences. And within three decades most of them had perished violently for their adherence to this very story.

### **9. *No pilgrimages or interest in Jesus’ tomb***

The critic will eventually need to answer this. Is it possible for all this widespread agitation and conflict of ideas – involving as

it did the definite claim that Jesus had risen – to have been conducted successfully, or indeed at all, if the actual physical body of Jesus existed?

There is no sign that the tomb of Jesus became an object of interest either to his supporters or to his enemies, during the critical weeks and years after the crucifixion.

One would expect that if Jesus' body was in the tomb, not a few would be interested in the condition of the grave, or its contents. And surely the issue would have been hotly disputed by both sides.

But of such controversy there is no trace. It seems to have been universally accepted that the tomb was empty. Every conceivable taunt and imputation possible against Christianity is found in apocryphal literature. But, contrary to what we might expect in such literature, the vacancy of the tomb is not denied, but the disciples are accused of having abducted the body. This is strange, indeed, this failure of the keenest intellects in Judea to put their finger upon the one solid and unanswerable argument – that the tomb remained unopened and the body was still there.

The only controversy of which we have any record – and it was a heated one – was on the question as to whether the disciples had stolen Jesus' body.

This is a formidable fact.

Of course, if it was true that the disciples had stolen the body, why were they not arrested? The penalty of the law was death for tomb violation. The only reasonable answer to that is that the authorities knew the disciples had not stolen the body. And so did plenty of other people.

There were guards at the tomb – which made physical abduction impossible.

But then it was reported that the guard was asleep. And who publicly said this? The Christians! But think now. *A guard which slept was of no use to the Christians.* It was futile and dangerous as an apologetic. Why, then, did this strange reference to the sleeping of the guard become embedded in the Christian version of what happened?

One thing is certain. This detail would not be inserted by a fabricator – because it could put his own life in danger. The only reason it was stated was because it was true. It is another element in the authenticity of the account.

Another thought about the tomb. Can you believe that any body of men or women could persistently and successfully have preached in Jerusalem a doctrine involving the vacancy of that tomb, unless the grave itself was physically vacant? The facts were too recent, the tomb too close.

No make-believe in the world could have purchased the utter silence of hostile records about the Jesus group's claim that the tomb was empty. Only the truth, in all its unavoidable simplicity, could have achieved that.

No one doubted that the tomb was empty. The disciples did *not* have to prove it. Nor did they have to use the women's frightening experience at the tomb on that resurrection morning as evidence.

The facts were so well known that the campaign Jesus' disciples undertook could positively be conducted with greater success in Jerusalem, where the abandoned tomb lay, than in any other place in the world.

It was this which enabled them to concentrate (as the book of Acts shows that they did) upon two vital claims which ultimately turned Judaism asunder:

1. that Jesus was the promised Messiah
2. that Jesus had risen from the dead.

These two advanced matters could not have been attempted so early if the emptiness of the tomb had not been common ground.

### ***10. Jesus' bodily resurrection was believed very early***

We find that the explicit references to Jesus' resurrection come early:

*This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. (Acts 2:32)*

Having regard to the context of Peter's speech here, the resurrection of Jesus can only be regarded as in the full physical sense.

### ***The imagined problem***

My problem may be, I am asked to believe something that is really unbelievable. I am asked to believe that a dead man rose from the dead. And I have NEVER SEEN A MAN WHO DID THAT.

Yes, there is a tremendous presumption against an ordinary man rising from the dead. However, coming to know Jesus as he was portrayed in the Gospels, one may perceive that, whereas it was unlikely that any ordinary man should rise from the dead, in his case the presumption is exactly reversed. It is unlikely that THIS man should not rise. It could be said that it was impossible that he should be bound by death.

Dr A.C. Ivy, of the Department of Chemical Science, University of Illinois, stated:

I can only say that present-day biological science cannot resurrect a body that has been dead and entombed for three days. To deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the basis of what biology now knows is to manifest an unscientific attitude according to my philosophy of the true scientific attitude. (Cited by Wilbur M Smith, in article, "Twentieth Century Scientists and the Resurrection of Christ", *Christianity Today*, April 15, 1957)

***Lawyers speak: "compelling evidence"***

Sir Edward Clarke, K.C., wrote:

As a lawyer, I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter Day. To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court, I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. (Wilbur M.A. Smith, *A Great Certainty in This Hour of World Crises*. Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, 1951, p.14)

Professor Thomas Arnold, author of a famous three-volume *History of Rome*, who was appointed to the chair of Modern History at Oxford, stated concerning the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus:

Thousands and tens of thousands of persons have gone through it piece by piece, as carefully as every judge summing up on a most important cause. I have myself done it many times over... I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort. (Wilbur M.A. Smith, *Therefore Stand: Christian Apologetics*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965, pp. 425,426)

While still Professor of Law at Harvard, Simon Greenleaf wrote a volume entitled *An Examination of the Testimony of the Four Evangelists by the Rules of Evidence Administered in the Courts of Justice*. In it he says:

The laws of every country were against the teachings of His disciples... Propagating this new faith, even in the most inoffensive and peaceful manner, they could expect nothing but contempt, opposition, reviling, bitter persecutions, stripes, imprisonment, torments, and cruel deaths.... They had every possible motive to review carefully the grounds of their faith.... If then their testimony was not true, there was no possible motive for its fabrication. (Simon Greenleaf, *Testimony of the Evangelists, Examined by the Rules of Evidence Administered in Courts of Justice*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965, pp.28-30. Reprinted from 1847 edition)

One finds a close agreement between the straightforward New Testament story and the actual historical and legal evidence.

To believe in this account is to accept every item of empirical, demonstrable evidence.

The conclusions of the critics can be wrong because they base them upon assumptions which are merely subjective, and are not objectively, historically vindicated.

Would you like a systematic, detailed coverage of the resurrection evidence? I respectfully suggest that you obtain a copy of either or both of these two books:

\* Frank Morison, *Who Moved the Stone? A Skeptic Looks at the Death and resurrection of Christ*

\* Jonathan Gray, *Stolen Identity: Jesus Christ – History or Hoax?* (<http://www.beforeus.com/stolen-id.php>)

## 21

# Can't agree together

The curtain opens. On stage is the Jesus Seminar. They explain their mission:

“We are a dedicated group of Christian scholars that DO NOT BELIEVE in the Bible the way it reads, and will rationally teach you how the New Testament is INACCURATE and can never be relied upon for true history.

“We will build a critical case and therefore provide critical explanations, while avoiding crucial biblical fact and disallowing the Bible to substantiate itself. We will gain control of your mind by creating a problem in order to bring a solution. This will justify our position as the final authority in the end.”

And some precious folk will swallow this hook, line and sinker. Naturally, I shall defend their right to do so. Freedom is a priceless gift to treasure.

Nevertheless, unfortunately or otherwise, I am afflicted with a drawback called common sense *caution*.

And that is what sent me tripping over a seventh impediment which hamstring Mr Funk's Jesus Seminar group: They come to conflicting conclusions. They have *no real agreement* among themselves as to who Jesus really was.

See for yourself this confusion on just three pages of Robert Funk's book *Honest to Jesus*:

- \* “Martin Kahler argued that....
- \* *His assessment has now been reversed by many scholars:...*
- \* “*Scholars are hopelessly divided* on a solution to the origins of the passion story....

\* “Unfortunately, scholars *have not been able* to isolate... or *to explain*....

\* “John Dominic Crossan has advanced the thesis that.... But *this view has not found wide acceptance*....

\* “Robert T. Fortna and others have argued that.... *His views have been countered by others*, who think that.... *There is no consensus* on....

\* “The one relatively fixed point in the continuing debate is that.... But *even here there is dispute*. Some have insisted that.... Some have proposed that.... And so the argument goes on, *without resolution* or even the prospect of resolution.

\* “...*we cannot be sure* that....then *we have no certain evidence* of.... In the view of most scholars,.... *But again scholars have not agreed on*....

\* “Nickelsburg’s theory *does not, however, help us determine* the history of the passion story. The simplest, most reliable solution remains the view that.... That solution has its *problems*.... Yet it may be *the best we can do until new evidence, or a new theory*... emerges.” (pp.238-240. Emphasis added)

The result has been a succession of crude speculations.

Suppose you are facing life-critical surgery. And on your way into the operating theatre you overhear the doctors disputing among themselves, “We cannot be sure...”; “This does not help us to determine...”; “That solution has its problems...”; and so on?

Wouldn’t you want to get out of that hospital... fast!

If you ask me, there’s something wrong here. If a construction engineer came up with contradictory assessments like that, he would be dismissed from the construction job.

So these JS “experts” of Mr Funk have the answers? Don’t hold your breath!

The Jesus Seminar reflect everything that is wrong with the critic today, including bias and laziness. They offer no evidence in support of their assertions.

One can say this for them: If it's uncertainties, contradictions and confusion you seek, then here's a team well equipped to guide you.

But really now, wouldn't you rather have the written testimony of eyewitnesses, than a *synthetic substitute*?

### ***A better track record***

The biblical books, although formerly accorded universal credence (until 150 years ago), have been jettisoned aside by the modern critic, obsessed with fanciful notions that these books cannot be historical.

But as new archaeological discoveries are made, the critic has had his view challenged repeatedly. Pushing further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Bible is showing *a better track record than its critics*.

For real time examples of this, see *UFO Aliens: Deadly Secret*, Chapters 8, 33, 34 and 35. (<<http://www.beforeus.com/aliens.php>>) It may surprise you to discover that the critics have a history of not getting things quite right.

Yet, undeterred, our good friend the critic keeps getting up, dusting himself off, and the "Inconvenient Truth" of each discarded objection is pushed down the 'memory hole'.

Indeed, the earth is flat, pigs were invented by Monsanto, and johnnny-come-lately critics know better than first century eyewitness reporters.

## **PART 7**

# **DO THE GOSPELS CONTRADICT EACH OTHER?**



## 22. What about the contradictions?

In Washington D.C. there is preserved in a glass case a unique copy of the Constitution of the United States.

When standing close to this famous document, the casual observer sees merely a blur of irregular lines and peculiar type.

But when he steps back, and with deliberation views the parchment from the proper perspective, he is rewarded by finding the portrait of George Washington etched beneath the old-fashioned lettering – the lines being so spaced and the letters so shaded as to form the likeness of the father of the American republic.

The correct point of view makes all the world of difference.

This is true also of that famous document, the Bible. To the surface reader, the Book presents an unfamiliar profile that, in places, the careless may assume is contradictory. But to the reverent, careful searcher for truth, all the characteristics of a loving, compassionate Deliverer are revealed.

***The critic claims:* The Bible is full of contradictions**, not the least being glaring differences in the stories told of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. **The four biblical gospels** (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) don't report the same story. Further, on significant points, such as Jesus' genealogy, they **contradict each other**.

## ***Rules for judging a contradiction***

***In reality:*** Wisdom dictates that we be careful, here. Much more is required than the mere appearance of a contradiction.

1. We must be certain that we have correctly understood the passage, the sense in which it uses words or numbers.
2. We must be certain that we possess all available knowledge in this matter.
3. We must be certain that no further light can possibly be thrown on it by advancing knowledge, textual research, archaeology, and so on.

Difficulties do not constitute objections. Unsolved problems are not of necessity errors.

And this is not minimizing the difficulty. It is viewing it in perspective. If we are honest about a matter, difficulties should drive us to seek further information.

Until we have total and final light on the matter, we are in no position to affirm, “Here is a proven error.” Archaeologically, countless “objections” against the Bible have been fully resolved over the past century.

## ***Contradictions or just variations?***

Variations in the Gospels are not necessarily contradictions.

For example, Matthew says that Judas died by hanging himself (Matthew 27:5), whereas Luke says he fell headlong and burst open with all his bowels gushing out. (Acts 1:18)

On the surface this may seem like a contradiction, but with a little thought you will see that the two accounts are compatible. Both of these statements are true.

Matthew, in order to be strictly factual, mentions the simple fact that Judas died by hanging himself. However, Luke, in his report in Acts aims to arouse revulsion among his readers, both for the field spoken about and for Judas, and nowhere denies that Judas died by hanging.

Tradition has it that Judas hanged himself on the edge of a cliff, above the Valley of Hinnom. Eventually the rope snapped, was cut or untied and Judas fell upon the field below as described by Luke.

A visitor to Jerusalem went to the locality to check this out and found that the traditional site adjacent to the old city was, indeed, on the edge of a cliff.

The four Gospel reports concerning Jesus are not contradictory, but complimentary, as by four different witnesses of the same event.

The fact that these four Gospels give us their own separate reports enables us to trust their honesty. Had each writer parroted the others, we might suspect collusion. Early Christians accepted all four Gospels as conveying the truth accurately from four different perspectives of the events. They did not try to change any details to make them appear more in agreement.

If you interviewed four different witnesses of the same accident, you would find each giving you a different story. Yet all would be telling the truth. And by putting their different accounts together you could get a pretty full picture, right?

On the other hand, if they all said the exact same thing in the exact same way, you might legitimately suspect collusion.

But what do you find in these four Gospel reports?

1. They included material that reflected badly on themselves.
2. They diverged in their accounts.
3. And importantly, their basic testimony about Jesus' death and resurrection *can be dated early*.

History re-written to suit an agenda? One has to be kidding. Those Gospels are honest accounts – and the best hypothesis we have to explain *what truly happened*.

The Gospels exhibit remarkable agreement on the major events. There are differences of reportage where, for example, one writer records events chronologically while another reports them in a topical sequence.

While Jesus spoke in the Aramaic language, each Gospel writer reported his statements in another language - Greek. So one should expect variation between each Gospel in the choice of Greek words. Yet there is still an 80 percent agreement in the words of Jesus.

It should be understood that *Matthew* wrote for Jews, so his focus was aspects of Jesus' life and identity that resolved questions in Jewish minds. On the other hand, *Luke* wrote for Gentile converts, addressing questions of concern to them.

Many of the apparent disagreements are cultural variations of the sort we might expect, such as Luke, out of consideration for his Gentile readers, not using the Jewish term "Son of Man" where Matthew or Mark do. This was a society well-attuned to preserving oral tradition.

Then again, *John's Gospel* adds information not recorded by the other three writers, at the same time omitting much of what they recorded. Why is this? The answer is in the *purpose* of John's Gospel.

Jerome tells us that although the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke were already in circulation, John's fellow apostles urged him to record the things he had been preaching which were *not covered in the other three Gospels*. John asked his companions to fast and pray for three days that God would show him what to do. The next morning, Andrew was strongly impressed that John should write these memoirs in his name, but they were all to certify. (*Muratorian fragment; Jerome and Gennadius*. Transl. by Ernest Cushing

Richardson. Oxford: James Parker 7 Co., 1892; Elva Schroeder, *Whatever Happened to the Twelve Apostles?* Norwood, South Australia: Peacock Publications, 1994, p. 23)

I recommend Eta Linnemann's treatment of supposed contradictions in her book *Is There a Synoptic Problem?* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992.

### ***Jesus' two genealogies***

***The critic claims:*** There is a contradiction between Luke's recorded ancestry of Jesus, and Matthew's recorded ancestry of Jesus. Matthew says Joseph (Mary's husband) was the son of Jacob, but Luke says Joseph was the son of Heli. (Matthew 1:16; Luke 3:23)

***In reality:*** A contradiction? To imagine a contradiction is to misunderstand Hebrew usage.

You will notice that the genealogies of Matthew and Luke give two different lines of ancestors. ***Matthew*** follows the Jewish custom which was to trace a genealogy through the male line. He traces through Jesus' ***legal*** father Joseph. But since Jesus had no blood relationship to this male line of Joseph's, ***Luke*** traces through Jesus' ***actual*** mother.

This is shown by the two narrations of the virgin birth.

***Matthew*** 1:18-25 tells the story only from ***Joseph's*** perspective. ***Luke*** 1:26-56 is told wholly from ***Mary's*** point of view.

Of course, we might wonder, why is Joseph mentioned in both genealogies? The answer is again simple.

***Luke*** follows strict Hebrew tradition in mentioning only males. Therefore, in this case, Mary is designated by her husband's name.

Two lines of evidence support this.

1. In Luke's genealogy, *every name* in the Greek text, *with the one exception* of Joseph, is preceded by the definite article (e.g. *'the'* Heli, *'the'* Matthat). Although not obvious in English translations, this would strike anyone reading the Greek, who would realize that it was tracing the line of Joseph's wife, even though Joseph's name was used.

2. The Jerusalem Talmud, a Jewish source, recognizes the genealogy to be that of Mary, referring to her as the daughter of Heli (Hagigah 2:4).

*It is Hebrew usage* for Luke to say: "Joseph, which was the son of Heli." (Luke 3:23) The word "son" was used by the Hebrews in at least four different senses—an immediate son, a descendant several generations removed, a Levirate son, or a son by in-law relationship.

One may ask, is it correct in a genealogy to include names belonging not just to biological, but also to legal parents? The answer is, Yes. Matthew uses *the custom of the day*.

### ***Can a genealogy include legal parents?***

If Mary had no brothers, she was an heiress. Therefore her husband, according to a principle of *Jewish law* (Numbers 36), was reckoned among her father's family, as his son. This is why *Joseph* (son-in-law) *could be counted as a son of Mary's father Heli*.

The aim of the two different genealogies is to show that Jesus is the legal and literal Son of David, qualified to reign over Israel as its final and eternal King.

*Matthew* lists Jesus' *legal lineage* through Jacob's son Joseph. *Luke* lists Jesus' *physical line* down to Heli's daughter Mary.

Both genealogies are correct.

*Matthew* traces the royal line from King David's son Solomon,

through a man named Jeconias, and down to Joseph. Jeconias' physical offspring were barred forever from sitting on David's throne. (1 Chronicles 3:16; Jeremiah 36:30)

However, Matthew makes clear, after listing Joseph's lineage from Jeconias, that Jesus himself was *not* a physical descendant of Joseph. Matthew narrates the story of Jesus' virgin birth. Thus he proves how Jesus avoids the Jeconias problem and remains qualified to sit on David's throne.

*Luke*, on the other hand, shows that Jesus is in fact physically descended from David through David's son Nathan, apart from Jeconias, thus fully qualifying him to inherit the throne of David. (Luke 1:32) He does not say Jesus is physically descended from Joseph. Rather, he notes that Jesus was "as was supposed" the son of Joseph (Luke 3:23), while he was actually the son of Mary.

That Luke would record Mary's genealogy fits with his interest as a doctor in mothers and birth, as well as with his emphasis on women in his Gospel, which has been called "the Gospel for Women".

This further calls attention to Mary, who of necessity was the sole human parent through whom Jesus can have descended from a line of ancestors.

Her genealogy is thus listed, starting with Heli, who was Joseph's father-in-law, in contradistinction to Joseph's own father Jacob.

We possess, therefore, a wealth of reasonable explanations for Joseph being called "the son of Jacob" as well as "the son of Heli". If we're honest about this, *a contradiction cannot be proven*. There is no need to assume error in either genealogy.

### ***Thorough research proves reliability***

Dr Gleason Archer undertook a painstakingly detailed investigation into this question. Notice his report:

As I have dealt with one apparent discrepancy after another and have studied the alleged contradictions between the biblical record and the evidence of linguistics, archaeology, or science, my confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture has been repeatedly verified and strengthened by the discovery that almost every problem in Scripture that has ever been discovered by man, from ancient times until now, has been dealt with in a completely satisfactory manner by the biblical text itself – or else by objective archaeological information. The deductions that may be validly drawn from ancient Egyptian, Sumerian, or Akkadian documents all harmonize with the biblical record. (Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982, p. 12)

And former skeptic Josh McDowell adds his testimony:

After trying to shatter the historicity and validity of the Scripture, I came to the conclusion that it is historically trustworthy. If one discards the Bible as being unreliable, then one must discard almost all literature of antiquity.

One problem I constantly face is the desire on the part of many to apply one standard or test to secular literature and another to the Bible. One must apply the same test, whether the literature under investigation is secular or religious.

Having done this, I believe we can...say, 'The Bible is trustworthy and historically reliable. (Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999, p. 68)

What gets to me is the way the critic downplays or ignores such evidence. Stuck with an addictive hang-up against the biblical Jesus, he has to fall back on shaky speculations. That's fine. But he now wants to foist his synthetic sophistry onto us gentle folk who are honestly seeking truth.

You may ask, why does he deny the straight facts? Is it from a lack of integrity? Or simply from careless research - glibly quoting others just as misinformed as himself? You be the judge.

### ***The challenge***

One might ask, well, what's the value in all this, anyway?

If no measurable benefit followed the message of Jesus, the skeptic would then have a convincing argument that it was fruitless. But the very extent to which men's lives have been changed for the better by the simple Gospel of Jesus is the supreme proof of its worthwhileness and divine vitality. Jesus brings peace into the heart in a world cursed with relentless warring.

Now the verdict must be delivered. Every person must decide whom to believe – the speculative critic centuries removed from the Jesus who walked on earth, or those who walked with him and died for him.

The same evidence that forced first century skeptics to do a dramatic U-turn, has, time after time, had the same results in our day. That's what the evidence does. It is good evidence.

I submit that this is not a debatable issue, historically. It is an inherent part of reality. The world is not flat, and the critic is not credible.

After all has been revealed, one will do well to stand back and

acknowledge it: this witness of Jesus' contemporaries has the 'ring of truth.'

Mr Funk's Jesus Seminar are, purely and simply, playing parlor games. They have built a house of straw based on inconsistencies, guesswork and manipulations. They merely assume what they must prove.

But with the host of emerging evidence a totally new ball game begins.

\* \* \* \* \*

For extra information on authorship, dating and authentication of the New Testament books, the following web pages should be helpful:

\* *Profiles of Key Issues Concerning the Four Gospels*  
<http://www.tektonics.org/ntdocdef/gospdefhub.html>

\* *A refutation to Acharya S. on the Gospels*  
<http://www.tektonics.org/af/achygosp.html>

# APPENDIX A

## Caiaphas (AD 31)

For what it is worth, I shall mention another document that may eventually prove to have significant value. The jury is still out.

A number of manuscripts were preserved in the Mosque of S. Sophia in Constantinople (now called Istanbul) by order of Mohammed II, and lay concealed for some 1,500 years, with *no attempt to give them to the public*. Two of them in particular are written in what is known as square Hebrew. These are *read only with difficulty by the best Hebrew scholars*, and they must have text books to assist them.

These two scrolls, official court documents from the first century, bear the name of Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest who officiated at the alleged trial of Jesus in AD 31. The first, addressed to Roman governor Pontius Pilate, gave lengthy reasons why he condemned Jesus Christ and the charges against him.

Scholars, after unwinding several feet of this scroll, came across another communication from Caiaphas. It was a solemn report to the Sanhedrin on the same matter. (*The Archko Volume*, translated by Drs McIntosh and Twyman of the Antiquarian Lodge, Genoa, Italy, from manuscripts in Constantinople. Also from the Senatorial Docket, taken from the Vatican at Rome. 1896, pp.92-93)

Today I find some skeptics wanting to dispute this document. Its authenticity was not called into question until 53 years after the announcement of its discovery.

It should be understood, however, that:

1. Since there was no attempt to give this document to the public during the centuries of its existence, there exists no apparent motive for forgery.

2. The peculiar features of the document were beyond the ability of its discoverer to fake. As already noted, it can be read only with difficulty by the best Hebrew scholars, who must have text books to assist them.

A close study of the case for and against its authenticity, weighs more heavily in favor of its authenticity than against it.

However, should one choose to bypass this document, there still remains a wealth of undisputed documents substantiating the historicity of Jesus Christ.

# APPENDIX B

## How to benefit from all this

### What Love!

I never really understood the significance of this for me personally, until one day in Melbourne, Australia, I was standing on a curb, about to cross a street. Suddenly the realization hit home - and some long standing questions were resolved. These were questions that millions must be asking. So I shall lay them out here, with what I believe to be the correct answers.

**1. Does He really care about me? ANSWER:** God's never-ending love for you is far beyond your understanding. He loves you as though you were the only lost soul in the universe. He would have given his life for you if there had been no one else to rescue. *YOU ARE PRECIOUS IN HIS SIGHT.*

**2. How can I know God loves me? ANSWER:** He has **DEMONSTRATED** his love for you. Because He loved you so deeply, He was willing to see His only Son suffer and die, rather than be deprived of you for eternity. You will not be able to understand, but He did it, **JUST FOR YOU.**

**3. Did Jesus die for me personally? ANSWER:** Jesus died to satisfy the death penalty against you. His death would be accepted by God as full payment for all of a person's past wrongs.

**4. But how could he love someone like me? ANSWER:** Amazing wonder of wonders! His love is unconditional - whether you're a thief, adulterer or murderer. He created you. **HE LOVES YOU.**

## YOUR PART IN THE RESCUE PLAN

**Here's what to do:**

**1— First realize the basic problem. You do need Jesus.**

Remember, you're under the death sentence. And you cannot save yourself. You cannot be rescued without Jesus. He is not A way. He is THE way.

The Bible is quite explicit about the fact that if I do not recognize sin in my life, and do not turn with true sorrow for my sin to be washed clean of it, then I am at enmity with God.

So you've messed up your life? GOOD NEWS: Jesus wants you just **as you are** — no matter how filthy, how unlovely.

So ADMIT your need. Tell Him you're sorry. ASK for forgiveness. Jesus provides IMMEDIATE PARDON, freedom from guilt.

**2 — We desperately need pardon.** But we just as desperately need the POWER to **stop sinning**. Jesus is able to change you in this life and fit you for the coming new earth.

He can make a kind and attentive husband out of the town drunk.

**Complete surrender** of your will to Jesus will change the way you live. When the POWER of His Spirit floods into your life, **you will know peace and victory and constant happiness, no matter what happens to you.**

When God places His own character in people, He makes them as beautiful as a sunset, as enjoyable as the placid surface of a lake, as refreshing to others as a mountain stream or a waterfall. Yes, He can do that! He is the Creator!

**3 — Feed your mind on positive books and tapes, and especially the Bible.** For starters, read John's gospel over and over until the

evidence overwhelms you. Ask God to help your unbelief and put into your life His resurrection power, and you will prove it for yourself!

**4** — Associate with people who love Jesus, obey all His commands and are supportive.

**5** — Be baptized.

**6** — Like Jesus, reach out to those still lost and share His marvelous love.

You can be sure of this... Jesus will become the best Friend you ever had - now and forever.

## **OTHER RELEVANT QUESTIONS:**

**\* IS JESUS FROM PAGAN MYTHS?**

Jonathan Gray, *Stolen Identity*, 2007,  
chapters 11-12, 15, 25, 40-42  
(<http://www.beforeus.com/stolen-id.php>)

**\* THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF INVENTING JESUS**

*Stolen Identity*, 2007, chapter 28

**\* SKEPTICS CRUSHED BY MESSIAH PROPHECY**

*Stolen Identity*, 2007, chapters 23-24

**\* JESUS' RESURRECTION: WHAT EVIDENCE?**

*Stolen Identity*, 2007, chapters 33-37

<http://www.beforeus.com>

## QUESTIONS A CRITIC MUST ANSWER

1. If Jesus never existed, then why does his name evoke such powerful curses and emotions in Jewish references today?
2. What motive would anti-Christian Roman, Jewish and Greek writers have to forge documents supporting the existence of Jesus?
3. Since Christianity was exploding to challenge established values, why is there no evidence that the historicity of Jesus was ever questioned during the first few centuries?
4. If Jesus as God was an invention of the fourth century – if Constantine and his bishops inserted statements or books into the Bible to make Jesus more godlike – would you please supply the evidence for this?
5. If our Bible has been changed by Constantine, then why do 99% of surviving New Testament manuscripts come from sources over which Constantine had no control?
6. If the Eastern Church also changed the Bible, would you please supply evidence of this?
7. If the books 'Q', 'Secret Mark' and Thomas were written before the New Testament Gospels, would you please supply hard evidence of this?
8. Would numerous men be willing to die for something they knew to be a hoax?
9. Could the outrageous, culture-challenging claims of Christianity have had any chance of success, if the actual physical dead body of Jesus existed?



### Other books by Jonathan Gray

Dead Men's Secrets  
 Sting of the Scorpion  
 The Ark Conspiracy  
 Curse of the Hatana Gods  
 64 Secrets Ahead of Us  
 Bizarre Origin of Egypt's Ancient Gods  
 The Lost World of Giants  
 Discoveries: Questions Answered  
 Sinai's Exciting Secrets  
 Ark of the Covenant  
 The Killing of Paradise Planet  
 Surprise Witness  
 The Corpse Came Back  
 The Discovery That's Toppling Evolution  
 UFO Aliens: The Deadly Secret  
 Stolen Identity: Jesus Christ – History or Hoax?  
 The Big Dating Blunder  
 How Long Was Jesus in the Tomb?  
 The Sorcerers' Secret  
 Was That a Miracle?  
 Update International Volume 1  
 Update International Volume 2  
 Update International Volume 3  
 Update International Volume 4  
 Update International Volume 5  
 Update International Volume 6

### E-books from

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 In a Coffin in Egypt  
 What Happened to the Tower of Babel?  
 The Magic of the Golden Proportion  
 4 Major Discoveries  
 Curse of the Pharaohs

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