

The Historical Quest for the Real Jesus

INTRODUCTION

"We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty." — II Peter 1:16

"The most consequential life in human history was lived twenty-one centuries ago in the eastern portion of the Roman empire by a person who never traveled a hundred miles from his birthplace, never held public office, never wrote a book, and died at the hands of the state in his early thirties." — George Will, The Conservative Sensibility

The Controversy

The Biblical Jesus.

• Peter's confession – Matt. 16:13, 16.

Revisionist's Jesus.

• Hermann Samuel Reimarus, Fragments: The Intention of Jesus and His Disciples (1774-78).

Jesus Matters.

- "Who is Jesus?" is the most decisive question in life.
- Augustine in *The City of God*:
 - Christianity stands or falls on the reality of who Jesus was and what Jesus did.
- Is the New Testament a reliable witness?
- "The Jesus of history" v. "the Christ of faith."
- What's at stake?
 - (1) The historical reliability of the Bible.

(3) The reality of Christian spirituality.

- (2) The validity and credibility of the Christian faith.

C. S. Lewis: The Great Trilemma.

- Four means by which God has revealed Truth to humanity.
- (1) God has endowed humanity with a moral conscience.
- (2) God has sent humanity "good dreams" i.e., divinely-inspired myths.
 - ► CSL: "I mean those [strange] stories scattered all through the heathen religions about a god who dies and comes to life again and, by his death, has... given new life to men."
- (3) God's revelation of himself to the Jewish nation as recorded in their Scriptures.
- (4) "Then comes the real shock:"
 - ► CSL: "Among these Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if he was God. He claims to forgive sins. He says he has always existed. He says he is coming to judge the world at the end of time... what this man said was, quite simply, the most shocking thing that has ever been uttered by human lips."
 - [NOTE: Jesus claimed to be "God" and the great "I AM" in the context of the Jewish religion i.e., he claimed to be the transcendent God and Creator of the universe.]
 - ► Jesus' claimed to forgive sins, yet also described himself as "humble and meek."
 - Lunatic, liar, or Lord? "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg or else he would be the Devil of Hell.

"You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you or spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

A Fourth Alternative: Jesus as Legend.

- The greatest weakness in *Mere Christianity*.
- Why the omission?
 - (1) A lack of interest?
 - (2) A lack of preparedness?
- Lewis was an expert in ancient literature and mythology.

► The gospels as a unique literary genre.

► CSL: "As a literary historian, I am perfecting convinced that whatever the Gospels are they are not legends." ["Was Jesus a Legend?" in *God in the Dock*]

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The Uniqueness of Christianity

Why Should Anyone Believe in Christianity?

- (1) Cultural/religious reasons.
- (2) Psychological reasons.
- (3) Sociological reasons.
- (4) Pragmatic reasons.
- (5) Because it's true!
 - ► Ultimately, the only reason to believe in Christianity is if it's true.
 - ▶ Bart Ehrman: "Among the many things that made Christianity different from the other religions of the Roman Empire, with the partial exception of Judaism, is that Christians insisted that it did matter wghat you believed.... Christianity, unlike other religions, was exclusivistic.... The Christian religion came to be firmly rooted in truth claims."
 - ► C. S. Lewis: "Christianity is a statement which, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important...."
 - ► Christianity is a coherent, consistent, and comprehensive biblical worldview that encompasses all of life, all fields of knowledge, and all of reality.

Revelation Through History.

- George Ladd: "The uniqueness of the Christian religion rests in the mediation of revelation through historical events."
- The issue of falsifiability.
- The linchpin issue.
 - ► II Peter 1:16 "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."
 - ► I Cor. 15:1ff—"... Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, he was buried, he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and he appeared...
 - "... [I]f Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile."
 - ► Ben Witherington: "Whether Christianity stands or falls depends on certain historical facts.... Among these facts that are most crucial to the Christian faith is the fact of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. The Christian faith is not mere faith in faith [fideism] but rather a belief about the significance of certain historical events....
 - "[T]he resurrection of Jesus is the most important event in all of human history...."

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Jesus Through the Centuries

A Man for All Times.

- Jeraslav Pelican, Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture.
 - ► "Jesus of Nazareth has been the dominant figure in the history of Western culture for almost twenty centuries.... But it has been characteristic of each age of history to depict Jesus in accordance with its own character. For each age, the life and teachings of Jesus represented an answer to the most fundamental questions of human existence and of human destiny."

Rabbi and Messiah.

- Biblical basis:
 - ► Luke 4:16-21.
 - ► Matt. 16:13-17.
 - ► Acts 2:36, 38.

The Divine Logos.

- Divine "Reason" or the divine "Word."
- Biblical basis:
 - ▶ John 1:1-12.

King of Kings.

- Constantinian triumphalism.
- "Christ Militant."
- Biblical basis:
 - ► Revelation 11:15.
 - ► Revelation 17:14.

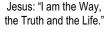
Christ the Mystic.

- Biblical basis:
 - ► Luke 5:16.
 - ► I Thess. 5:17.
 - ▶ John 14:20.

Prince of Peace.

- The Reformation-era religious wars.
- The Anabaptist and Spiritualist view of Christ.
- Biblical basis:
 - ► Matt. 5:9.
 - ► Matt. 26:52.
 - ▶ John 18:36.







Jesus as "Christ Militant"

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The Sage of Common Sense.

- The Jesus of the Enlightenment.
- An ethical sage.
- Biblical basis:
 - ► Matt. 5-7 The Sermon on the Mount.

The Poet of the Spirit.

- The Romantic Jesus.
- Biblical basis:
 - ► Song of Songs.

The Bourgeois Jesus.

- The Jesus of the Protestant work ethic.
- Biblical basis:
 - ▶ Luke 19:11.
 - ► Proverbs 10:22.

Jesus Christ, Liberator.

- The Jesus of Liberation Theology and "social justice."
- Biblical basis:
 - ► Luke 6:20.
 - ► Luke 1:46-53 The "Magnificat".
 - ► James 5:1-6.

The Rebel Jesus.

- Jesus as a countercultural hippie.
- Biblical basis:
 - ► Matt. 6:19-20.
 - ► Matt. 6:25ff.
 - ► Matt. 8:20.

Jesus the New Age Guru.

- The syncretistic "Cosmic Christ."
- Bib

| Biblical basis: | Claiming to have the authority to make people into God's children. | this intercent of terminatory necessing in particu- larly designers in young people who haven't been taught to ignore this yet. He changes people and claims to set them fore. — From an early house of Right On |
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| ► John 14:20. | HELYAUGUST 1979 | |
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Contemporary Revisionism: Three Examples

The "Lost Tomb of Jesus."

- A Discovery Channel documentary (2007).
- Ossuaries of "Jesus," "Mary," "Mariamne," "Matthew," "Jose," and "Judas, son of Jesus."
- The Talpiot Tomb.
- The producers/directors:
 - ► James Cameron.
 - James Tabor.
 - ► Simcha Jacobovici.
- Physical "evidence" of Jesus' burial?
- Some shaky speculations:
 - (1) Mitochondrial DNA tests.
 - (2) Was "Judas" the son of Jesus and Mary Magdalene?
 - (3) The statistical odds.
 - (4) The missing ossuary of "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus."
- · Old news.
- The problem of biased editing.
- Problems of the "stolen body" theory.
- Wild speculations.
- Nominal statistics.
- The case of the James ossuary.

Ossuary of James

- The scholarly critique.
 - ► Joe Zias: The documentary is "nonsense" and its producers "have no credibility whatever.... Projects like these make a mockery of the archaeology profession."
 - ► William Dever: "This would be amusing if it didn't mislead so many people."
 - ► Paul L. Maier: "Simcha Jacobovici... is an Indiana Jones wannabe who oversensationalizes anything he touches.... This whole affair is just the latest in the long-running media attack on the historical Jesus."

| The motivations. | | |
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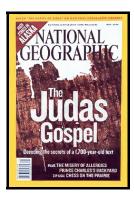
The Gospel of Judas (2nd Century).

- The Nag Hammadi "Gnostic Gospels" (discovered in 1945).
- A National Geographic feature in 2006.
- An alternative form of Christianity?
 - ► Elaine Pagels: The Gnostic Gospels "explode the myth of a monolithic Christianity."
 - ▶ Bart Ehrman: The *Gospel of Judas* is so significant that the history of early Christianity needs to be rewritten.
- The truth about Gnosticism.
- An "alternative account" of the relationship between Jesus and Judas.
 - N. T. Wright: Those who take the Gospel of Judas seriously are creating a "new myth" of Christian origins.
- A mistranslation.

The Gospel of Jesus' Wife.

- Karen King, Hollis Professor of Divinity, Harvard University.
- A 1-1/2" x 3" papyrus fragment:
 - "...not [to] me. My mother gave me life.... The disciples said to Jesus,...deny. Mary is (not?) worthy of it.... Jesus said to them, "My wife... she is able to be my disciple... Let wicked people swell up... As for me, I am with her in order to... an image...."
- A scholarly sensation.
 - ► New evidence that Jesus might have been married to Mary Magdalene?
 - ► King: "[I]t should lead us to re-think how Christianity understood sexuality and marriage in a very positive way, and to recapture the pleasures of sexuality, the joyfulness and the beauties of human intimate relations."
 - ► Ref. Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (2003).
- The case for skepticism.
- The controversial provenance.
- Ariel Sabar, "The Unbelievable Tale of Jesus' Wife" [Atlantic Monthly, Jul/Aug 2016)].
 - ► Walter Fritz.

| • The conclusion: A modern forgery, and a case of academic malpractice. |
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The Real Jesus:

The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels

Luke Timothy Johnson

PREFACE

The Author and the Book

Luke Timothy Johnson.

- Professor of New Testament at Candler School of Theology of Emory University.
- Roman Catholic and a former Benedictine monk and priest.

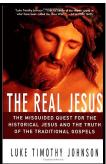
Kudos.

- Christianity Today: "One of the most exhilarating religious books published in this decade."
- N.T. Wright: "This book exposes... the shallowness of much would-be scholarship about Jesus."

Purpose of the Book.

- (1) To challenge the pseudo-scholarship of radical biblical scholars.
 - Luke Timothy Johnson: "I wrote this book to blow the whistle on a form of scholarship I consider misguided and misleading."
 - LTJ: This book is "not about the Jesus Seminar but about the much more troubling problem of which the Jesus Seminar is only the most irritating... manifestation, namely, the state of biblical scholarship in the present generation."





- LTJ: "Much is at stake. If my analysis is correct, the state of biblical scholarship within the church is in critical condition."
- (2) To challenge the idea that "history" is the primary basis for the Christian faith.

| | (3) To challenge readers to personally experience "the real Jesus." | |
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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE JESUS QUEST

Jesus Re-imagined

Early Christological Heresies.

- Docetism.
- Adoptionism.
- Arianism.
 - ► *Homoousious* and *homoiousious*.

The Bible Under Fire.

- Marcion (c. 85-160).
- Porphyry (c. 234-305).
- Augustine (354-430), On the Harmony of the Gospels.
- Biblical textual criticism.

The Modern Quest for the 'Historical Jesus'

Enlightenment Rationalism.

- The search for the historical Jesus beneath the layers of doctrine and mythology.
- A secular reaction to the excesses of the Reformation Era.
- The influence of deism.
- Separating the "Jesus of history" from the "Christ of faith."
- An alternative eschatology.
 - ► A social evolutionary model.

Historical Criticism.

• The historical/critical approach to Biblical scholarship: the working assumptions.

• Later Christian doctrines were attributed to Jesus by the apostle Paul.

- Rationalism.
- ► Naturalism (anti-supernaturalism).
- ► Skepticism.

Thomas Chubb (1679-1746).

- A revisionist view of Jesus of Nazareth.
- Jesus as a "first-century Palestinian Deist."

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Herman Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768).

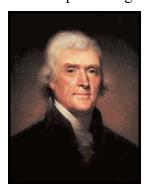
- A Lutheran scholar and private skeptic.
- The first influential Jesus quester.
- Fragments: The Intention of Jesus and His Disciples (1774-78).
- Jesus was a Jewish nationalist and a failed revolutionary.
 - ► A politicized "kingdom of God."
 - ► Jesus was a deceiver and a failure.
 - ► Jesus' resurrection was a hoax.
 - Christianity as we know it was an invention of the early church.
 - ► The Four Gospels were fabrications.

Thomas Paine (1737-1809).

- *The Age of Reason* (1794).
 - ▶ Jesus was "a virtuous and amiable man" who preached "a system of morality of a most benevolent kind" that resembled the teachings of the Greek philosophers.
 - ► The Christian faith was a "fraud."

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826).

- A Deist and a Unitarian.
- ► A professing Christian.



- ► Jesus was the greatest moral teacher, social reformer and humanitarian in history.
- ► Jesus' "system of morals" was "the most perfect and sublime that has ever been taught by man."
- ► Jefferson: "I am a Christian in the only sense in which I believe Jesus wished anyone to be: sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others."
- ► Jefferson: "I am a *real* Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus."
- Jefferson's "Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth" (1804).
 - ► Distilling the essential Jesus from "the corruptions of Christianity."
- "The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth" (a.k.a. the "Jefferson Bible," 1820).
 - ► An anti-supernatural rendering of the life of Jesus.

Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792-1860).

| • | The Gospels as mythology. |
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| • | Redating the New Testament texts. |
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David Friedrich Strauss (1808-74).

• *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835).



- ► An "unbiased" study of the historical Jesus.
- ► The Gospels as "religious, not historical, truths."
- ► The NT as "creative myth-making."
- ► Jesus was a delusional Jewish rabbi who thought he was the Messiah.
- Miracles violate natural physical laws and are therefore fictitious.
- Gospel stories with parallels to other ancient myths and legends should be rejected.
- ► The resurrection as mass hysteria.
- *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History* (1865).
 - ► The Gospel of John is entirely mythical and unreliable as an historical document.
- A controversial celebrity and an alienated scholar.

Bruno Bauer (1809-82).

- A Critique of the Gospels and History of Their Origin (1851).
 - ► The "Christ-Myth" theory and the incredible shrinking Jesus.
- A Critique of the Pauline Epistles (1852).

The Mythical Jesus: A Critique

- Constantin Francois Volney, "Ruins of Empire" (1791), and Charles-Francois Dupuis, *The Origin of All Religions* (1795).
 - ► All religions are variations on one universal religion.
 - ► The early Christians worshiped Jesus Christ as a sun-god.
- Arthur Drews, *The Christ Myth* (1909).
 - ▶ Bart Ehrman: "*The Christ Myth* was arguably the most influential mythicist book ever produced because it made a huge impact on one reader in particular. It convinced Vladimir Ilyich Lenin that Jesus was not a real historical figure. This, in large measure, led to the popularity of the myth theory in the Soviet Union." [*Did Jesus Exist?*]
- Rudolf Bultmann:
 - "[T]he doubt as to whether Jesus really existed is unfounded and not worth refutation.

 No sane person can doubt that Jesus stands as founder behind the historical movement whose first distinct stage is represented by the oldest Palestinian community."
- Robert M. Price, *Deconstructing Jesus* (1999), *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man* (2004), and *The Christ-Myth Theory and Its Problems* (2011).

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- Richard Carrier, *Proving History: Bayes's Theorem and the Quest for the Historical Jesus* (2012) and *On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt* (2014).
- Bart D. Ehrman, Did Jesus Exist: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth (2012):
 - ► "I should say at the outset that none of this mythicist literature is written by scholars trained in New Testament or early Christian studies teaching at the major... accredited theological seminaries, divinity schools, universities, or colleges of North America or Europe.... Some of them rival *The Da Vinci Code* in their passion for conspiracy and the shallowness of their historical knowledge.

"[T]here is simply no way to convince conspiracy theorists that the evidence for their position is too thin to be convincing and that the evidence for a traditional view is persuasive. Anyone who chooses to believe something contrary to evidence that an overwhelming majority of people find convincing... will not be convinced."

Ernest Renan (1823-92).

- A French Catholic and a historical novelist.
- *The History of the Origins of Christianity* (1864).
 - ► Jesus was a Jewish reformer, a mystic and a "beautiful young man" who preached universal brotherhood.
 - ► Jesus' self-reference as the "Messiah" and "Son of God."
 - ► Jesus had "unusual psychic powers" but was not divine and worked no miracles.
 - ► The resurrection myth was the product of Mary Magdalene's "hallucination."
- Renan's historical novels on early Christianity.
- Renan's influence:
 - ► The myth of Mary Magdalene as a reformed prostitute.
 - ► The romantic relationship of Jesus and Mary.
 - Subsequent Christian historical fiction.

Adolph von Harnack (1851-1930).

- What Is Christianity? (1900).
 - ► Deconstructing the Gospel of John.
 - ► The apostle Paul as the original Jesus revisionist.
- Opposition to the Apostles' Creed.

William Wrede (1859-1906).

- The Messianic Secret (1901).
- Deconstructing the Synoptic Gospels.



Adolph von Harnack

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Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965).

- A Lutheran theologian, medical doctor and missionary.
 - ▶ Winner of the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize.
- *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1906).
 - ► A non-orthodox view of Jesus.

Martin Kahler (1835-1912).

- The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ (1892).
- A Neo-orthodox orientation.
 - ► The Gospels are authoritative in matters of faith, but not historical.
 - ► Historical research cannot provide a basis for Christian belief.
 - "We have no sources for a biography of Jesus which measure up to the standards of contemporary historical science."
 - The quest for the historical Jesus is a journey down "a blind alley."
- Christian existentialism and the "living Christ."

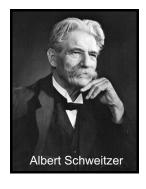
Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976).

- The prototypical theological liberal.
- A cultural accommodationalist.
 - ► Involvement in the Confessing Church movement.
 - Neutrality on Nazism.
 - ► A traditional pastor and a liberal theologian.
- Historical revisionism.
 - ► Bultmann: "I do indeed think that we can know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often
 - legendary; and other sources do not exist."
 - ► Jesus as a mythological symbol.
- "De-mythologizing" Scripture.
 - ► Making Christianity "relevant" and acceptable.
 - Separating the true kernel of the Gospel from the husks of superstition and myth.
 - ► Anti-supernaturalism.
 - ► Bultmann: It is impossible for anyone who uses electricity to believe in miracles and the New Testament world of demons and spirits.
 - ► The resurrection myth.

Bultmann's legacy

| • | The problem | of an | mythological | Savior. |
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Karl Barth (1886-1966).

- A conventional liberal theological education.
 - ► The influence of Adolph von Harnack.
- Involvlement in the Confessing Church.
 - ► Principle author of the Barmen Declaration.
 - Emigration to Switzerland.
- Two decisive influences:
 - (1) The Great War and human depravity.
 - (2) The practicalities of pastoral ministry.
- Biblical existentialist theology.
 - ► The influence of Kierkegaard.
 - Historical skepticism.
 - ► Barth: The only certainty about Jesus was that he died on the cross for our sins.

A Neo-Orthodox Reaction.

- Ernst Kasemann and "The Problem of the Historical Jesus" (1953).
- Gunther Bornkamm's Jesus of Nazareth (1956).

The Jesus Quest Since 1960.

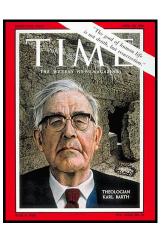
• Five Theological Orientations.

| Radical | Liberal/Skeptical | Neo-Orthodox | Historical/Skeptical | Conservative |
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| Jesus Seminar | Bart Ehrman | Luke Timothy Johnson | | Ben Witherington |
| John Dominic Cros | san | | N. T. Wright | Darrell Bock |
| John Shelby Spong |) | | John Meier | Gary Habermas |
| Marcus Borg | | | | William Lane Craig |

The Summa.

- C. S. Lewis, "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism" (1959).
 - ► The ignorant arrogance behind the radical historical Jesus Quest.
- Craig Blomberg on irrational anti-supernatural bias.
 - ► "A proper historiography must allow for the miraculous as a possible explanation for the events that cannot be plausibly explained otherwise. The only way to avoid this conclusion is to begin with an anti-supernaturalist or atheist bias. If there is a God similar to the one theists postulate, then it is eminently reasonable that at times of his choosing he should wish to intervene in the space-time universe and generate events not otherwise attributable to natural processes."

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Radical Revisionism and The Jesus Seminar

[Luke Timothy Johnson, "The Real Jesus" Chapter 1: "The Good News and the Nightly News"]

"Beware of finding a Jesus entirely congenial to you."

- Robert Funk, Roy W. Hoover and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels*

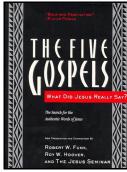
The Jesus Seminar

A Pseudo-Scholarly Charade.

- Luke Timothy Johnson: The Jesus Seminar is "a small, selfselected association of academics who meet twice a year to debate the historical Jesus."
- Robert Funk and the Westar Institute of Sonoma, California.
- A radical remnant of the Society of Biblical Literature.
- A traveling road show and a media event.

The Agenda.

- The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus (Macmillan, 1993).
 - ▶ "The Scholars Version."
 - ► Robert Funk, et al: "The Jesus of the gospels is an imaginative theological construct, into which has been woven traces of that enigmatic sage from Nazareth traces that cry out for recognition and liberation from the firm grip of those whose faith overpowered their memories. The search for the authentic Jesus is a search for the forgotten Jesus."
- The goal of the Jesus Seminar is "to liberate Jesus from the Gospels."
 - ► The NT offers up a "mythic" or "cultic" Jesus."



| ► Funk: "We need a new narrative of Jesus, a new Gospel" | AND THE JESUS SEMINAR V |
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"Scholarly" Assumptions.

- An unreasonable burden of proof.
- Less than 25% of the words attributed to Jesus are authentic.
- Nearly the entire Gospel of John is fraudulent.
- A reconstructed Jesus.
 - ► An itinerant Hellenistic Jewish sage, a faith healer, and a social rebel.
- The problem of Jesus' "self-referential" statements.
- No atonement.
- No physical bodily resurrection.
- The Acts of the Apostles is historically unreliable.
- The oral v. written traditions.
- The church creeds are "theological tyranny."
- A lack of self-criticism.
 - ► Scot McKnight: "A reconstructed Jesus is just that one scholar's version of Jesus."
 - ► Dale Allison: "I opened my eyes to the obvious: I had created a Jesus in my own image, after my own likeness.... Maybe we have unthinkingly reduced biography [of Jesus] to autobiography."

[Luke Timothy Johnson, "The Real Jesus" Chapter 2: "History Challenging Faith"]

The Radical Elite

Barbara Thiering.

- *Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (1992).
- The Dead Sea Scrolls are the key to unlocking early Christian history.
 - ► The history of the Qumran community and the early church are the same.
 - ► The Gospels are elaborate cryptograms.
 - ► John the Baptist was the Teacher of Righteousness.
 - ► Jesus was the "wicked priest" who opposed the Teacher or Righteousness.
- An imaginative reconstruction of Jesus' burial.

 Jesus' post-"resurrection" life.

John Shelby Spong.

- A former Episcopalian bishop of Newark, N.J.
- A "Bible-believing, Bible-based Christian?"
- Spongian Bibliology:
 - ► The Bible was not supernaturally inspired.
 - ► The Gospel narratives as mythology.
- Born of a Woman: A Bishop Rethinks the Birth of Jesus (1992).
 - ► The infancy accounts were written in the 2nd century and are mostly mythological.
 - ► The real story of Jesus was covered up by the Gospel writers.
 - ► Mary was "really" a teenaged girl who was raped and became pregnant with an illegitimate child, and was then taken under the protection of Joseph.
 - ► The myth of the virgin birth and veneration of Mary has contributed to the oppression of women in Western history.
 - ► Jesus might have been married to Mary Magdalen.
 - ► The resurrection was "not so much... a supernatural external miracle but... the dawning internal realization that this life of Jesus reflected a new image of God..."
- Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism (1992).
 - ► Paul was a homosexual who reflected the patriarchal attitudes of his day.
- Why Christianity Must Change or Die: A Bishop Speaks to Believers in Exile (1998).
 - ▶ Publisher's blurb: "Not since Martin Luther has a leader risen from within the church to call for a more powerful reformation than that found in the pages of this book...."
 - ► *Publisher's Weekly*: "Spong takes on the structure of Christianity itself in order to formulate a Christianity for the postmodern age...."
- Luke Timothy Johnson: "Having a bishop with opinions like these is a bit like hiring a plumber who wants to 'rethink' pipes."

John Dominic Crossan.

- Co-chair of the Jesus Seminar and a professor of Biblical studies at DePaul University.
- Historical Jesus bibliography:
 - The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant (1991).
 - Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography (1994).
 - Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus (1995).

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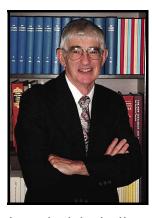


- A self-described "liberal Christian" and an anti-supernaturalist.
 - ► God is not an "objective reality."
 - ► "The Bible is the inspired Word of God" but only in a metaphorical sense.
- A defective critical methodology.
- A New Testament skeptic.
 - ► The Gospel accounts of Jesus' life have little historical value.
 - ► The Pauline epistles and the Acts of the Apostles have little historical value.
- A high view of the Gospel of Thomas and the Q Gospel.
 - ► JDC: "If I am wrong on those presuppositions, my reconstruction is methodologically invalidated."
- Jesus was a "Peasant Jewish Cynic" and an eschatological prophet.
 - ► JDC: "His kingdom consists of an open table where everyone accepts everyone else."
- Speculations on Jesus' body after the crucifixion.
 - ► The Secret Gospel of Mark.
 - A purely metaphorical and mythological resurrection.
- The criterion for analysis.
- A convinced theoretician.
 - ▶ Robert M. Price: "I believe I detect in Dr. Crossan's work a tendency to reduce Jesus to a function of the categories and methods through which he has decided to study him."
- Superficial erudition.
 - ► N. T. Wright: Crossan's *The Historical Jesus* is learned, inventive, and interesting, but "almost entirely wrong."
 - ► William F. Buckley Jr.: Crossan's apologetics are "an interesting intellectual gymnastic act."

Marcus Borg.

- Professor of religion at Oregon State University.
- A self-described "committed Christian... a layperson, an Episcopalian, nonliteralistic and nonexclusivistic."
- Historical Jesus bibliography:
 - ► Jesus, a New Vision (1987).
 - ► *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (1994).

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- An "original" interpretation of Jesus.
 - ► No literal resurrection.
- Borg and the "problem" of Christian exclusivism.
 - ► MB: Jesus is "one of many mediators of the sacred."
 - ► The idea of "supernatural intervention tends to privilege Christianity. It typically claims that God has acted in this tradition as God has acted in no other tradition."
- Separating the "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of faith."

Burton Mack.

- Professor of New Testament at the Claremont School of Theology.
- Historical Jesus bibliography:
 - ► A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins (1988).
 - ► *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* (1993).
 - ▶ Who Wrote the New Testament? The Making of Christian Myth (1996).
- The Four Gospels were embellished accounts of Jesus' life produced to promote the agenda of the early church.
 - ▶ Jesus goal was to start a "social experiment" not to be the Savior of humanity.
- Christianity did not begin with a Big Bang (i.e., the resurrection and Pentecost), but slowly evolved into a mass movement.
 - Over time, various cults associated with Jesus and "the Christ" coalesced into a major movement, which created a common mythology.
- The earliest source material about Jesus was a "Lost Gospel" (the Q Theory.)
 - ► Charlotte Allen: Mack's Q theory depicts "a Jesus with little supernatural baggage but much respect for cultural diversity."

A. N. Wilson.



- British novelist and biographer.
- · A candid skeptic.
 - ► ANW: "I did not feel it was honest to continue to call myself a Christian, to attend churches which addressed Jesus as if he were alive, to recite creeds which acknowledged Jesus as Lord and Judge of the world."
- A strictly human Jesus.
- Jesus (1992):
 - "The Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith are two separate beings."
- Paul as the "inventor" of Christianity.

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A Critique

The Marketing of Pseudo-Scholarship.

- Reasons why radical scholarship enjoys popular appeal.
- Exploiting ignorance of the Bible and Christian history.

The Academic/Publishing Nexus: An Unholy Alliance.

- Academia and the publishing industry.
- Three publishing options.
 - (1) Brilliant new scholarship.
 - (2) More-and-more about less-and-less.
 - (3) Novelty and sensationalism.
- Rewarding dishonest scholarship.

A Question of Character.

- Three factors in fraudulent scholarship.
 - (1) Intellectual pride.
 - (2) An anti-Christian bias.
 - G. K. Chesterton: "Behind every double standard is a single agenda."
 - (3) The moral factor.

A Note on Historical Revisionism.

- The legitimate role of historical revisionism.
- The problem of radical revisionism and historical deconstructionism.

Hellacious Heresy.

- Jesus regarded heresy as a serious sin: Matt. 7:15-16.
- Paul on heresy: Gal. 1:6-7; Col. 2:8; II Tim. 2:23; 4:3-4; Titus 3:10-11; Acts 20:28ff.
- Peter on heresy: II Peter 2:1-3ff.
- Jude on heresy: Jude 3-4, 17-19.
- John on heresy: I John 2:18-27; 4:1-3; 5:13; II John 7-11.
- The problem of heretical dishonesty.
 - C. S. Lewis: "[Clergy and scholars who have rejected traditional orthodox beliefs] are apt to protest that they have come by their unorthodox opinions honestly. [They claim that] in defense of those opinions they are prepared to suffer obloquy [attacks on their character and career] and to forfeit professional advancement. They thus come to feel like martyrs. But this simply misses the





point which so gravely scandalizes [the common Christian layman]. We never doubted that the unorthodox opinions were honestly held: what we complain of is your continuing your ministry after you have come to hold them. We always knew that a man who makes his living as a paid agent of the Conservative Party may honestly change his

views and honestly become a Communist. What we deny is that he can honestly continue to be a Conservative agent and to receive money from one party while he supports the policy of another."

Post-Script: Faith and the Media.

- Inappropriate venues for substantive issues.
- The media's main interests in religion.
 - Religious controversies.
 - ► Salacious scandals.
 - ► Celebrities.
 - Cults.
 - Election of a pope.
 - Sensational discoveries.



[Lee Strobel, "The Case for Christ"

Chapter 6: "Is the Jesus of History the Same as the Jesus of Faith?"]

The Problem of Radical Jesus Scholarship

The Seminal Issue.

• Is there a difference between the "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of faith?"

What's at Stake?

- The historicity of Jesus and an imaginary Christ.
 - The "Christ of faith" as a free-floating construct of one's own imagination.
 - Bart Ehrman: "The New Testament accounts "are not historically reliable descriptions of what really happened".... The New Testament is useful for "theological reflection on the meaning and importance of Jesus."

► Albert Mohler: "Christianity stands or falls on the truth concerning Jesus, and thus it

• Once we separate the "Jesus of history" from the "Christ of faith," we create a new faith.

| truths of the New Testament, there is no Christianity, just superstitions and fantasies." |
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► Grant Jeffrey: "It does matter whether or not Jesus of Nazareth truly lived, died, and rose from the dead. If the Gospel's record about Jesus is nothing more than a curious myth, then Christianity is a fraudulent religion that has deceived billions of faithful souls over the last 2000 years.... If Jesus did not rise triumphantly from the empty tomb, then our hope of salvation is nothing more than a dream based on the greatest lie in history. The position espoused by many modern religious philosophers is that the 'idea' or myth of Jesus is the truly important thing...

"Ultimately, if Christianity is divorced from historical events as described in the written text of the Gospels, then every one is free to create their own 'Christ' in their own image... [but] a mythological Jesus cannot reconcile humanity to God.... The mystery of Jesus is that he is both part of history and he also transcends it."

- ► C. S. Lewis: Basic Christianity is this: Christ died for us, and his death cleanses us of our sins. By his resurrection, he triumphed over death. "That is Christianity. That is what has to be believed."
- ▶ When we divorce the Jesus of History from the Christ of Faith, we reduce Jesus to a purely mythological character.
- ► Gregory Boyd: "Jesus is not a symbol of anything unless he's rooted in history....

 Theological truth is based on historical truth... I don't want to base my life on a symbol.

 I want reality."

Radical Scholarship: The Fundamental Presuppositions

1. An anti-supernatural bias.

• A naturalistic *a priori* bias against miracles and Bible prophecy.

2. The New Testament is historically unreliable.

- Robert Funk: The goal of the Jesus Seminar is "to liberate Jesus from the Gospels.... We need a new narrative of Jesus a new Gospel."
- Purging the Gospels of "later accretions" or other "distortions of faith."
- The burden of proof.
- The Gospels as 2nd century creations of various churches.

3. The testimonies of the early Church Fathers are unreliable.

• The Church Fathers were obviously biased in favor of the Jesus myth.

| 4. The non-canonical "Gospels' | ' are as credible as the New T | Testament. |
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| While being hyper-critical of the traditional gospels, skeptics suspend all critical judgement of the non-canonical "gospels". |
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5. For 1900 years, the church has misunderstood and misapplied the Gospel story.

- Traditional Christianity has distorted the message of the "real Jesus."
- Jesus' real message was a radical social critique of the established order.

6. We *can* know something of Jesus and the early church, but our guide should be the social sciences, not the New Testament.

• Unlike the New Testament writings, the social sciences are objective and unbiased.

7. The Principle of "Double Dissimilarity."

- Anything attributed to Jesus that "sounds like" either the Jewish rabbinical tradition or the traditions of the early church is probably inauthentic.
- Gregory Boyd: "The obvious problem is that Jesus was Jewish and he founded the Christian church, so it shouldn't be surprising if he sounds Jewish and Christian!"

8. The Principle of "Multiple Attestation."

• We can only be confident that Jesus said or did something if it is found in multiple sources.

9. The Jesus myth is not unique in ancient history.

• Miracles are attributed to other figures in ancient history, so Jesus is not unique.

Postscripts

Apollonius of Tyana (c. 15-100 AD?).

- · Philostratus.
- Raymond Bernard's The Unknown Life of Christ.
 - ► Apollonius was "the greatest figure in western history" and the model on which "the later Christian messiah" was based.
- Problems with the Apollonius myth.

The "Mystery Religions".

• Similar themes to Christianity.

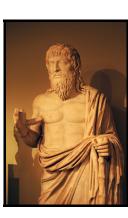
Apollonius of Tyana

- Problems with the mystery cult myths.
 - ► It is more sensible to believe that the mystery religions borrowed from Christianity.

The Secret Gospel of Mark.

- John Dominic Crossan: This was the original source for the Gospel of Mark.
- A modern forgery?

| The Jesus Seminar: Th | | | |
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Biblical Scholarship and the Culture War

[Luke Timothy Johnson, "The Real Jesus" Chapter 3: "Cultural Confusion and Collusion"]

Introduction

General Theme and Overview.

- The cultural divide.
- The "cultural mission" of the Jesus Seminar.
- A "post-Christian" era.
- Two contrasting worldviews:
 - (1) Christian theism.
 - (2) Modern secularism.
- Protagoras versus Plato.

Newsweek: "The Decline and Fall of Christian America" (April 13, 2009)



The Key Issues.

- (1) What is the Bible?
 - ▶ Jefrey D. Breshears: "The Bible is is the revelation of God's will and purpose for mankind in the context of history and in relation to four doctrinal themes: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration." [Introduction to Bibliology, p. 65.]
- (2) Who was the "real Jesus?"
- (3) What is Christianity?
- (4) What is the church?

Two Competing Perceptions.

• The presuppositions.

• The muddled reality.

• The institutional caretakers.

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The Church and Modernity

The Challenge of the Enlightenment.

- Enlightenment "liberation".
- The role of historical criticism.
 - ► The church and science.
 - Superstitions and church dogma.
 - ► Biblical textual criticism.
 - Luke Timothy Johnson: "Bit by bit, the medieval assumption that the 'real world' and the 'biblical world' were coextensive came under assault... Criticism convincingly challenged the traditional dating and authorship of books. Finally, the veracity of the stories themselves came into question.

"When the creation accounts, the Exodus, and the Exile were challenged for their historicity, Christians sometimes practiced strategic defeat: this or that aspect of the Bible could be relegated to myth or legend, but the 'important stuff' remained true.

"What was seldom noted, however, was that both attackers and defenders had accepted the same definition of truth. The greatest triumph of the Enlightenment was to convince all parties that empirically verifiable truth – i.e., historical truth – was the only sort of truth worth considering.

"It was inevitable that the 'important stuff' itself would [eventually] come under siege, and that historical criticism... would turn to Jesus and Christian origins."

Four Responses.

- (1) Passive resistance.
 - ► Fundamentalism and pietism.
 - ► Cultural insularity and non-invovement.
- (2) Active resistance.
 - Evangelical Protestantism and conservative Catholicism.
 - ► The role of cultural apologetics.
- (3) Passive accommodation.
 - ▶ Mainline liberal Protestantism and liberal Catholicism.
 - ► LTJ: "This is the most ambiguous response."
 - Reconciling modernism and traditional rituals.
 - ► Cultural sell-out.

► Denominational wars.

► II Timothy 3:5 – "Having a form of godliness but denying its power."

- (4) Active accommodation.
 - Unitarian/Universalism, the Jesus Seminar, and "progressive Christianity."
 - Cultural accommodation.
- An alternative to the liberal/conservative rift?

The Crisis of Modern Scholarship

A Faulty Tower.

- The nexus of traditional biblical scholarship.
- A critique of the Reformation.
 - LTJ: Martin Luther rejected tradition and "made the key to right living dependent on the right reading of Scripture" the principle of *sola scriptura*.
 - Private interpretation and the fragmentation of the Body of Christ.
 - ► The Protestant rejection of post-biblical church tradition.
- Luther as the first modern critic of the New Testament.
 - ▶ LTJ: "Luther could never, I think, have envisaged a form of biblical scholarship that would define itself over against faith. But he inadvertently caused the crack that would later widen to a chasm.... Unintentionally, Luther became the father of later generations of German rationalist scholars."
- The problem of historical critical methodology.
 - ► LTJ: "Attackers and defenders of orthodoxy alike appealed to the evidence of history in support of their positions. The 'historical critical method' was assumed to provide the only legitimate rules for debate...

"What had fundamentally eroded... was the framework of canon, creed, and church [tradition] by which Christianity had defined itself since the late 2^{nd} century. The creed was under attack, the canon was challenged, and the church's tradition was regarded as the problem."

- The fundamental problem with historically-based biblical criticism.
 - ► A theoretical academic environment removed from the real world.
 - No accountability to actual Christian communities.
 - ► LTJ: "Biblical scholarship in America increasingly found its home to be secular universities and schools of theology where the fundamental commitment was to the intellectual life, rather than denominational seminaries that were committed primarily to the formation of clergy for the church."

Therefore, future ministers are subjected to "the emptiness of biblical scholarship apart

| from communities for whom these ancient texts have real-life significance." | |
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Popular Media, Entertainment, and Serious Scholarship.

- Popular media, as a subset of the entertainment industry, are inappropriate and ineffectual forums in which to present substantive theological issues.
- Religion as popular entertainment.
- Can the media promote true Christianity?
 - ► LTJ: "The inadequacy of the electronic media to deal with serious issues in any serious way except through sound bites and personality profiles would not be so grievous except for the fact that the American public is notoriously addicted to television as its chief source of both entertainment and news."

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The Parameters of History

[Luke Timothy Johnson, The Real Jesus Chapter 4: "The Limitations of History"]

The Nature of History

A False Assumption.

- Luke Timothy Johnson: "Perhaps the most problematic aspect of the spate of Historical Jesus books is the authors' assumption that 'history' is unproblematic."
- In fact, reconstructing history is a complex process.

What Is History?

- Historia: A process of inquiry into the past.
- Components of history:
 - (1) Reconstructions of the past.
 - What happened, when it happened, where it happened, and who was involved.
 - (2) Interpretations of the past.
 - Why and how something happened.
 - The significance of what happened.
- The problem of historical facts.

Historical Sources.

- Primary sources.
 - ► How true and accurate are these accounts?
- Secondary sources.
 - ► How long after the fact was the account written?
 - ► How true and reliable are these accounts?
- · Oral traditions.
 - ► The problems of oral transmission.



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The Limitations of History.

- History is a social science and a literary art.
- History is problematical.
- · History is selective.
- History is interpretive.
 - ► The product of human intelligence and imagination.
 - ► There is no purely objective, unbiased history because there are no purely objective, unbiased historians.
 - ▶ Kenneth Scott Latourette: "No one writes history without presuppositions.... Every attempt to tell the human story... involves [selectivity]. Back of the selection is a conviction of what is important. Governing this 'value judgement' is, consciously or unconsciously, a philosophy....

Furthermore, a sterile "objectivity" is not even preferable – one must *care* about what he/she is researching and writing:

"Truth is not attained by reason [and scholarship] alone. The insight that is born of faith can bring illumination.... Throughout the chapters which follow is the conviction that the faith which is stimulated by contact with the Christian Gospel, the faith which is the commitment to God of the whole man, body, mind, and spirit, the commitment which is the response in love to God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, opens the mind towards the true understanding of history."

- Much of history is based on probabilities, not certainties.
- Historical reconstructions are tentative.

Issues in Christian History

The Good News.

- Christianity is an historically-based faith.
 - ► George E. Ladd: "The uniqueness of the Christian religion rests on the mediation of revelation through historical events. Christianity is not just a code for living or a philosophy of religion. It is rooted in real events of history."
- The origins of Christianity are relatively accessible to historians.

The NT was composed before the end of the 1st century.

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The Not-So-Good News.

- The lack of confirmation from non-biblical sources.
- Most of what was written about early Christianity was written by Christians.
 - ► These accounts are obviously biased.

[NOTE: The Dead Sea Scrolls shed no light on early Christianity; the "Apocryphal Gospels" are mostly unreliable Christian fiction; and the "Gnostic Gospels" are heretical distortions of early Christianity.]

- The issue of chronology.
 - ► The key: the Acts of the Apostles.

Revisionist Scholarship and the Problems of History.

- Weaknesses in the historical-critical method.
- Problems in historical revisionism.
 - Outside the NT sources, revisionist scholars operate purely within the realm of their own imagination.
 - ▶ Ben Witherington: "There is a considerable difference between the historical Jesus and the historically reconstructible Jesus."

"It is important to distinguish between what Jesus actually did and said two thousand years ago and what the historical-critical method can discover and conclude about it. While Christian faith must be grounded in the historical Jesus and his ministry, this is different from claiming that it should be based on the ever-shifting tides of NT scholarship. What is true about the historical Jesus and what the historical method can demonstrate are not one and the same....

"What [the historical critical method] cannot do is prove... that Jesus did not say or do this or that...

"Furthermore, just because one cannot establish the authenticity of some particular saying or event with the historical-critical method does not mean that it absolutely did not happen or was not said. In various cases the fault may lie...

- (1) in the limitations of the methodology itself;
- (2) in the paucity of the evidence at hand; or(3) in the bias or limited skills of [the historian himself or herself]."

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— 5 — Jesus in History

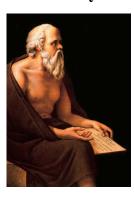
[Luke Timothy Johnson, The Real Jesus Chapter 5: "What's Historical About Jesus?"]

Historical Problematics

Interpretive Complexities.

• Since "history" is interpretations on the past, no topic is without its problems.

Case Study: The Historical Socrates.



- Who and what was the historical Socrates?
 - ► The "historical Socrates" is elusive and hard to reconstruct.
- Socrates, according to Aristophanes.
- Socrates, according to Xenophon.
- Socrates, according to Plato.
- Luke Timothy Johnson: Ultimately, the "historical Socrates" cannot be separated from "the Socrates of his interpreters."
- The Socrates of history is less important than the Socrates of faith (or myth).
- A false analogy.

The New Testament Material The Gospels.

- (1) The Gospels as ancient biographies.
 - Justin Martyr: The Gospels as "the memoirs of the apostles."
 - Bruce Metzger: The Gospels as "interpretive portraits" of Christ.
 - ► The Gospels as "literary compositions."

| (2) The Gospels were written several decades after the fact. | |
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- (3) The Gospel accounts are biased.
 - ► All were written by believers in Jesus from the perspective of faith.
 - ► The issue of discrepancies in the Gospel accounts.
- (4) The Gospel narratives contain miracle stories that are beyond the bounds of history.

In Summary...

• The evidence of reliability.

The ultimate issue.

► LTJ: "The accounts of Jesus' last days... are remarkable for the way they present a lengthy, sequential, and connected story. Furthermore, they are notable for the attention they give to details, including the time and place that events occurred. Most remarkable is the high degree of agreement among the four versions...

"The story of Jesus [also] intersects explicitly with the realm of 'real history.' Jesus is shown encountering well-known institutions... persons... situations... and [other] historical evidence" that can be verified from other sources.

- · The Gospels and historical credibility.
 - ► The problem of naturalistic bias.
 - Craig Blomberg: "When sources repeatedly prove trustworthy where they can be verified, they should be given the benefit of the doubt where they cannot [be verified]. This is what is known as placing the burden of proof on the skeptics when it comes to Gospel historicity. Kierkegaard is quite correct in saying that there is ultimately a leap of faith that goes beyond what historical evidence can provide. But contra Kierkegaard, it is not an absurd leap. One may liken the situation to a long jumper who runs as far as she can down the track but ultimately must leap into the pit beyond the track... Historical evidence moves us a long way towards demonstrating our belief; as a result, the faith that is necessary to fill in the remaining gap is reasonable.

"A proper historiography must allow for the miraculous as a possible explanation for events that cannot be plausibly explained otherwise. The only way to avoid this conclusion is to begin with an anti-supernaturalist or atheist bias. If there is a God similar to the one theists postulate, then it is eminently reasonable that at times of his choosing he should wish to intervene in the space-time universe and generate events not otherwise attributable to natural processes." ["The Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith: Harmony or Conflict?" in Paul Copan, ed., *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?* p. 115]

| The consistency of the Gospels. |
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Other New Testament Sources.

- Paul's testimony regarding Jesus.
 - ► Paul's presumption.
 - ► LTJ: "One of the most shocking aspects of recent Historical Jesus books is their complete neglect" of Paul's testimony regarding Jesus.
- Jesus in the epistles of James, Peter, and Hebrews.
- Points of corroboration.

What Really Matters.

• LTJ: "When the witness of the NT is taken as a whole, a deep consistency can be detected beneath its surface diversity."

Extra-Biblical Christian Sources

The Church Fathers.

The Apocryphal Gospels.

► The legend of King Abgar V of Edessa.

The Non-Christian Sources

Scattered References.

- Charles Templeton, Act of God (1978).
- The issue of the Dead Sea Scrolls.
- The issue of the Gnostic Gospels.

Josephus (c. 37-100).

- Josephus on the martyrdom of James "the Just."
 - ► James was "the brother of Jesus who was called Christ." [Antiquities 20.9.1]
- The "Testimonium Flavianum."
 - * "At this time there appeared Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one should call him a man. For he was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of people who receive the truth with pleasure. And he gained a following both among many Jews and among many of Greek origin. He was the Messiah. And when Pilate, because of an accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him previously did not cease to do so. For he appeared to them on the third day, living again, just as the divine prophets had spoken of these and countless other wondrous things about him. And up until this very day the tribe of Christians, named after him, has not died out." [Antiquities 18.3.3]

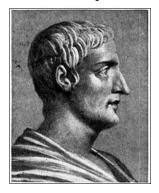
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The Babylonian Talmud.

- Textual problems with the Talmud.
- · Jesus as "Ben Pandera."
- Yeshua's "five disciples."
- Yeshua was "hanged" on Passover after a trial determined that he should be executed as a "sorcerer" who "led the people astray" into "apostasy".

Cornelius Tacitus (c. 55-117).

• Nero's persecution of Christians in AD 64.



"Therefore, to scotch the rumour [of his own guilt], Nero substituted as culprits and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men loathed for their vices, whom the crowd called 'Christians'. Christus, from whom they got their name, had been executed by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate when Tiberius was emperor, and a deadly superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out, not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but also in the city [of Rome], where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world meet and become popular...." [Annals 15.44.2-8]

Caius Suetonius (c. 70-125).

- Suetonius' Lives of the Twelve Caesars.
- Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome in AD 49 for rioting "at the instigation of Chrestus."
- During Nero's reign, "The Christians were punished; a sect that professes a new and mischievous superstition."

Pliny the Younger.

- Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia, in correspondence with the emperor Trajan (c. 110):
 - "I have never been present at trials of Christians; consequently I do not know the precedents regarding the question of punishment or the nature of the inquiry... "So far this has been my procedure when people were charged before me with being Christians. I have asked the accused themselves if they were Christians; if they said 'Yes,' I asked them a second and third time, warning them of the penalty; if they persisted I ordered them to be led off to execution. For I had no doubt that stubbornness and unyielding obstinacy at any rate deserved to be punished....

"They maintained that their fault or error amounted to nothing more than this: they

| | were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before sunrise and reciting an |
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antiphonal hymn to Christ as God, and binding themselves with an oath – not to commit any crime, but to abstain from all acts of theft, robbery and adultery, from breaches of faith, from denying a trust when called upon to honor it.... So I thought it the more necessary to inquire into the real truth of the matter by subjecting to torture two female slaves, who were called 'deacons'; but I found nothing more than a perverse superstition which went beyond all bounds.

"Therefore I deferred further inquiry in order to apply to you for a ruling. The case seemed to me to be a proper one for consultation because of the number of those who were accused. For many of every age, every class, and of both sexes are being accused....

"Nor has this contagious superstition spread through the cities only, but also through the villages and the countryside...."

- Trajan's response: Ignore the Christians, since they posed no real threat to the Empire.
 - ► However, if they were accused and refused to recant, they should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law for being obstinate, if nothing else.
 - ► "You have followed the correct procedure in deciding the cases of those who have been charged before you as Christians.... They must not be ferreted out; if they are charged and convicted, they must be punished..." [Letters 10.96]

Lucian of Samosata (c.160 AD).

- Lucian's description of the Christians of Palestine.
 - "[Peregrinus] learned the wonderful doctrine of the Christians by conversing with their priests and scribes near Palestine.... They spoke of [Christ] as a god, and took him for a lawgiver, and honored him with the title of master.... They still worship that great man who was crucified in Palestine, because he introduced into the world this new cult.... Moreover their first lawgiver has taught them that they are all brethren, when once they turned and renounced the gods of the Greeks, and worship that master of theirs who was crucified, and engage to live according to his laws." [The Passing Peregrinus 11-13]

The Letter of Mara Bar-Serapion (Late 1st century?).

| • | Mara | Bar-S | Serapion | 's i | letter to | his | son. | S | erapior | 1: |
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| | "What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as 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; and the Jews, |
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ruined and driven from their land, live in complete dispersion. But Socrates did not [really] die – he lived on in the statue of Hera. Nor did the wise King [really] die – he lived on in the teaching which he had given."

The Darkness During the Crucifixion.

- The testimony of **Thallus** in *Third History* (AD 52).
- The testimony of **Tertullian** (c. 160):
 - ► "At the same time at noonday there was a great darkness. Those who did not know that this was foretold concerning Christ thought it to be an eclipse. And some have denied it, not knowing the cause of such darkness. And yet you have that remarkable event recorded in your archives."
- ► The testimony of **Julius Africanus** (early 3rd century).
 - * "As to [Jesus'] many works... and the mysteries of his doctrine, and the resurrection from the dead, these have been set forth most authoritatively by his disciples and apostles before us. On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness, and the rocks were broken apart by an earthquake, and many places in Judaea and other districts were destroyed. In his *History*, Thallus mentions this darkness and calls it an eclipse of the sun. But the Hebrews celebrate the Passover on the 14th day according to the moon, and the passion of our Savior falls on the day before the Passover; but an eclipse of the sun takes place only when the moon comes under the sun."
- The testimony of **Phlegon** in *Collection of Olympiads and Chronicles* (2nd century).

• If Jesus was so important, why didn't more ancient authors write about him?

- The testimony of **Eusebius** in *Chronicle* (c. 330).
 - ▶ "All which things agree with what happened at the time of our Savior's passion. And so writes Phlegon, an excellent compiler of the Olympiads in his 13th book, saying: 'In the fourth year of the two hundred and second Olympiad there was a great and extraordinary eclipse of the sun, distinguished among all that had happened before. At the sixth hour the day was turned into dark night, so that the stars in the heavens were seen, and there was an earthquake in Bithynia that destroyed many houses in the city of Nice."

Lingering Questions.

| • | What accounts for the lack of interest on the part of Why didn't Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BC-50 AD) r | mention Jesus? | |
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