

JESUS

A VERY JEWISH MYTH

R.G. Price

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(Third Edition)

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rationalrevolution.net

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This work contains modified republications of the following previously published articles:

Jesus Myth - The Case Against Historical Christ - © 2007

Jesus Myth Part II - Follow-up, Commentary, and Expansion - © 2007

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*Special thanks to
Richard Carrier
Everyone at the Internet Infidels Biblical Criticism & History forum*

Preface

The idea that Jesus is a purely mythical figure has been around for a long time, but the "scholarship" surrounding this idea has not always been of the best quality. This isn't to say that there hasn't been any good scholarship on the subject, there has been some extremely good scholarship on the subject, but there has also been some extremely bad scholarship on the subject as well, just as there has been extremely bad scholarship on the history and life of Jesus the man. What I find is that a lot of the "bad scholarship" tends to be more popular on this subject than the good scholarship because it is more bombastic and exciting, while a lot of the good scholarship tends to be more dry and less interesting.

I feel that the subject of "Jesus as myth" has taken a largely unfortunate turn down the road of "pagan parallels", and this is my small effort to redirect the subject away from this path and towards what I think are the more legitimate avenues of study.

I don't think that there are no so-called "pagan" influences on the Christian religion, just that many of the "pagan parallels" claims are poorly researched and poorly constructed and don't actually address the real information, instead relying on the sensationalism of sticking it to the religion that has established itself as vehemently "anti-pagan".

There are many "pagan" aspects to modern Christianity, but by and large these don't account for the roots of the Jesus story, rather they account for what took place as the religion was later integrated into pagan culture.

I put together a second edition in order to present additional research and information, to offer additional support for a variety of the claims made within the book, and to address "The Lost Tomb of Jesus" presentation that aired on the on the Discovery Channel in March 2007 which claimed to have uncovered the family tomb of Jesus, along with the bones of Jesus himself.

I decided to put together a third edition of this book after writing *The Gospel of Mark as Reaction and Allegory*. The research and analysis that I did during the writing of that book brought additional evidence and understanding to light that I felt was compelling enough to warrant an additional revision to this book, though it is a minor revision.

The primary alternations to this edition over the previous editions deal with the origins of the Gospels and the early development of the Jesus narrative. In the prior editions I relied more on mainstream scholarship, whereas this edition reflects more of my own analysis of the Gospels, particularly the Gospel of Mark.

Introduction and Background

The proposition that the Jesus of the Gospels never existed, but that he instead originated from "myth", is not new. The idea in modern scholarship that Jesus Christ is entirely fictitious seems to have begun its development in the 18th century and to have become prominent in the 19th century, only to later recede in the 20th century.

Many of the early proponents of the idea that Jesus never existed were students and professors of comparative religion, who saw in the Jesus story reflections of sun worship and "pagan" mythology. Some of these observations have merit, but much of the early criticism of the story dwelt heavily on non-Jewish parallels, some of which were poorly established or based on poor understandings of the so-called pagan beliefs. In 1875 Kersey Graves published *The World's Sixteen Crucified Saviors*, which has been heavily criticized and has many factual errors. In this work Graves compared the story of Jesus to the supposed stories of sixteen other saviors. The problem here is that Graves got many of his facts wrong.

In 1909 the German philosopher Arthur Drews published *The Christ Myth*, which was a much more scholarly work that became quite popular and well known, even in America. That same year John E. Rensberg published a review of the scholarship about the nature of Christ among skeptical scholars of the time, from which the following text is taken:

The conceptions regarding the nature and character of Christ, and the value of the Christian Scriptures as historical evidence, are many, chief of which are the following:

1. Orthodox Christians believe that Christ is a historical character, supernatural and divine; and that the New Testament narratives, which purport to give a record of his life and teachings, contain nothing but infallible truth.
2. Conservative Rationalists, like Renan, and the Unitarians, believe that Jesus of Nazareth is a historical character and that these narratives, eliminating the supernatural elements, which they regard as myths, give a fairly authentic account of his life.
3. Many radical Freethinkers believe that Christ is a myth, of which Jesus of Nazareth is the basis, but that these narratives are so legendary and contradictory as to be almost if not wholly, unworthy of credit.
4. Other Freethinkers believe that Jesus Christ is a pure myth -- that he never had an existence, except as a Messianic idea, or an imaginary solar deity.

The first of these conceptions must be rejected because

the existence of such a being is impossible, and because the Bible narratives which support it are incredible. The second cannot be accepted because, outside of these incredible narratives, there is no evidence to confirm it. One of the two last is the only true and rational conception of the Christ.

Jesus Christ is a myth. But what do we understand by the term myth? Falsehood, fable, and myth, are usually considered synonymous terms. But a falsehood, a fable, and a myth, while they may all be fictions and equally untrue, are not the same. A falsehood is the expression of an untruth intended to deceive. A fable is an avowed or implied fiction usually intended to instruct or entertain. A myth is a falsehood, a fable, or an erroneous opinion, which eventually becomes an established belief. While a falsehood and a fable are intentional and immediate expressions of fiction, a myth is, in most cases, an unconscious and gradual development of one.

...

It is often difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish a historical from a philosophical myth. Hence the non-agreement of Freethinkers in regard to the nature of the Christ myth. Is Christ a historical or a philosophical myth? Does an analysis of his alleged history disclose the deification of a man, or merely the personification of an idea?

...

The hypothesis that Christ is a philosophical myth, based, like the preceding one, upon the Messianic idea, is thus presented by T. B. Wakeman:

"Never was there an example of a word becoming a believed person, under this law of materialization, more plainly and evolutionally than the 'Messiah' and 'Son of Man' of the Hebrew prophecies.... The Christ, 'Jesus,' was no man, for the reason that he was prophesied and visionated into this world and life to do a work that it would be utterly absurd to suppose a man could ever do. The Romans had killed, and could easily kill, every man who had tried to resist their oppression. Now the God Yahweh by his 'eternally begotten son,' spiritized as the 'Son of Man,' that is the 'Soul of the State,' as Shakespeare makes Ulysses say it, must, in order to be of any avail appear with supernatural powers. He was the personified people, Israel; he had been crucified alive, in their subjection and massacre even to the death and Hades. But by supernatural power he, the Israel, would rise again and

bring the final judgment backed by the infinite power of the nation's Father, Yahweh. It was only a Spirit-God who could do this -- nothing less could be originated, or thought of, or provided, for such a superhuman purpose. A person, a man, a reformer, a weak edition of Socrates, or Savonarola or Bruno! How absurd! The human heart in its despair by its imagination, brought a God into the world to do a God's work. 'No man,' said Napoleon; 'nor a God,' says Science, except the idea. Such it was that finally united the millions of Asia, Africa, Europe, and America, in a dream so intoxicating that it dares not to be awakened though the dawn of Science is here."

Mr. Wakeman argues that the silence of history for one hundred years after the alleged appearance of Christ can be explained only upon this hypothesis of an ideal Christ. To this the advocate of the historical myth may, I think, very properly reply: History, for the most part, takes cognizance only of noted men and important events; and while this silence precludes the existence of the supernatural Christ of Christians, and even that of the human Jesus of Renan, it does not necessarily preclude the existence of an obscure religious teacher and an insignificant sect which subsequently, by a chain of fortuitous circumstances, became the mightiest among the religions of the world.

...

While all Freethinkers are agreed that the Christ of the New Testament is a myth they are not, as we have seen, and perhaps never will be, fully agreed as to the nature of this myth. Some believe that he is a historical myth; others that he is a pure myth. Some believe that Jesus, a real person, was the germ of this Christ whom subsequent generations gradually evolved; others contend that the man Jesus, as well as the Christ, is wholly a creation of the human imagination.

- *The Christ; A Critical Review and Analysis of His Existence*; John E. Remsberg, 1909

In addition to the afore mentioned works, the following books were also published in opposition to the historical existence of Jesus prior to the First World War:

The Origin of All Religious Worship - Charles Dupuis, 1795 (France)

Criticism of the Gospel History of the Synoptics - Bruno Bauer, 1842 (Germany)

The Origin of Christianity from Graeco-Roman Civilization - Bruno Bauer, 1877 (Germany)

Christianity and Mythology - John M. Robertson, 1900 (England)

A Short History of Christianity - John M. Robertson, 1902 (England)

Pagan Christs: Studies in Comparative Hierology - John M. Robertson, 1903 (England)

The Christ Problem: Foundations for a Social Theology - Bremen Kalthoff, 1903 (Germany)

Jesus Christ Has Never Existed - Emilio Bossi, 1904 (Italy)

The Emergence of the Christianity. New Contributions to the Christ Problem - Bremen Kalthoff, 1904 (Germany)

What Do We Know of Jesus? An Account of Professor D. Bousset - Bremen Kalthoff, 1904 (Germany)

The Pre-Christian Jesus - William Benjamin Smith, 1906 (United States)

The Background of the Gospels. A Contribution to the Knowledge of the Genesis of Christianity - Bolland, 1907 (Holland)

God Jesus - Andrzej Niemojewski, 1909 (Poland)

The Christ Problem and the Future of Protestantism - Deutsche Wiedergeburt, 1909 (Germany)

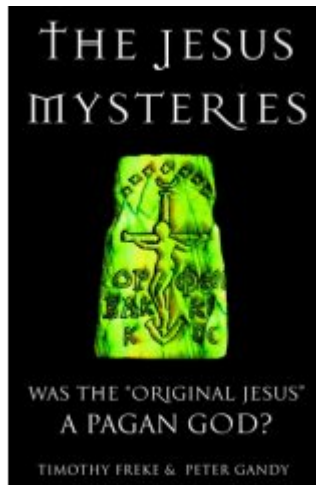
The Truth About Jesus: Is He a Myth?- Rev. Mangasar Mangasarian, 1909 (United States)

For a variety of reasons, investigation into the subject of Jesus as myth largely faded into obscurity in the West during much of the 20th century, probably having a lot to do with the World Wars, the Great Depression, and the Cold War, but in recent years the subject has risen in popularity again.

With the rise of the Internet there has been a further growth of "Jesus Myth" proposals by various people, sometimes based on poor research, resulting in a vast array of claims about the non-existence of Jesus and claims about various other "pagan" figures that the story of Jesus is supposedly copied from. Unfortunately there is a lot of bad material on this subject, both on the Internet and in print. That does not, however, mean that there is not also good material on this subject, but one does have to be very careful and check sources when claims are made. No one has all of the answers on this subject and I do not think that there is any single authoritative or complete work on this subject at the moment - it's still a subject very much in its infancy.

What is evident, however, is that there is something very wrong with the traditional explanation for the rise of the Christian religion, the origin of the Gospels, and the so-called "evidence" for a "flesh and blood" Jesus.

There has often been an emphasis on supposed "pagan" origins of the Jesus story, and this is true of some recent scholarship as well, with books such as *The Jesus Mysteries: Was the "Original Jesus" a Pagan God?* by Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, and websites such as POCM (The Pagan Origins of the Jesus Myth), as well as many others.



The problem with these resources, however, is that they are often poorly researched and/or stretch the facts, especially when making claims about so-called "pagan" gods and heroes, often going to pains to make their stories appear more similar to the Jesus story than they really are. *The Jesus Mysteries*, for example, has been heavily criticized along these lines.

This is not to say that some of these resources don't make some valid points or that everything they say is wrong or that there are no "pagan" influences on the Jesus story, but many of these resources are very problematic in the quality of their work.

In contrast to this we also have works by those such as Earl Doherty, G.A. Wells, and Robert M. Price which tend to be less bombastic and of higher quality (though Price does not explicitly state that Jesus is purely mythical).

My personal view, which I hope to demonstrate, is that the Jesus story is highly "Jewish" in nature and that the best place to look for understanding the origins of the Jesus story is Jewish literature and Jewish belief. This issue is complicated however, because the reality is that there was no clear distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish culture in the Mediterranean at the time, this is largely a later idea. Jewish literature and the Jewish worldview absorbed influences from surrounding cultures throughout history, especially during the few hundred years prior to the advent of Christianity, so drawing clear distinctions between "Jewish" and "non-Jewish" ideas really breaks down at a certain level. There is a difference, however, between the influence of ideas that diffused into Jewish culture from the Greeks and others over time, and claiming that the story of Jesus is simply a copy of the story of Mithras or Dionysus.

My analysis and my understanding of the Jesus story tends to look more towards Jewish sources and Jewish relevancy, whereas the analysis of some people tends to look more towards so-called "pagan" sources and relevancy for interpreting the Jesus story, which I feel is a wrong approach. This is not to say that Hellenistic influences were not significant, they defiantly were, nor do I exclude analysis of other parallels, but this has to do with where the emphasis is put and how elements are interpreted. As a result, my interpretation

of the Jesus story tends to be more in line with the traditional Christian interpretation of the story than some of the people who also propose that Jesus never existed.

Which Jesus?

One difficulty in making a case against the historical existence of Jesus is that there is no universally accepted historical view of Jesus Christ in the first place. Many people, it seems, both Christians and non-Christians, are content to hold on to a greatly diminished historical Jesus who becomes undetectable to history, while others continue to argue for Jesus Christ as the Son of God as described in the Gospels. Very different arguments are needed to address these differing views. A good example of this is the case of the "empty tomb". Believers in the traditional Christian story put forward the fact that there is no evidence of veneration of a tomb of Jesus as evidence that Jesus really was the Son of God and really was resurrected, thus there was no body in the tomb to venerate, thus explaining why we have no evidence for early veneration of the location of Jesus' burial. This is difficult for people who believe in a real historical Jesus who was just a man to explain, because they then have to explain why a real person who inspired the Gospels wouldn't have had the location of his burial venerated. The explanation that there was no Jesus in the first place, however, solves all of these problems, but has to be presented differently to address the two different sets of claims.

The range of views about "who Jesus was" runs the gamut, but at present the scholarly consensus seems to be that Jesus was an obscure and largely unknown figure who went mostly unnoticed during his own time. This may seem like an odd position to arrive at based on the Gospels, but the obvious lack of historical references to Jesus has led most scholars to split the difference and conclude that, while Jesus was an important figure who was portrayed as popular and well known in the Gospels, perhaps the Gospels overplayed his popularity in his own time, and thus between his Gospel portrayal and the lack of historical references to him he was somewhat popular, but not popular enough to be mentioned by non-followers. This is reflected in books today such as John P. Meier's *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*.

This view is now held by both Christian and non-Christian scholars, from Catholics to atheists and Jews. Ironically, it was the Protestant search for the historical Jesus during the Enlightenment that led to the increasingly diminished view of his historical role. While many Protestant scholars from the 17th and 18th centuries published works noting Jesus' absence from the historical record, they still maintained that some Jesus existed and that the Gospels themselves were acceptable historical sources. Christian scholars, from the Middle Ages through to the early 20th century, often chalked up the fact that there were so few references to Jesus in the Jewish records to a Jewish conspiracy of silence, claiming that Jews didn't record his existence on purpose, either out of spite, fear, or a unified plan to blot him out of history.

Nevertheless, it is still quite common today to hear people, even atheists, say things such as "Jesus was a great moral teacher," "Jesus may not really have been the Son of God, but he still gave the world its greatest philosophy and moral code," or "No one has done more to make the world a better place than Jesus."

Even though most people today still assume or believe that Jesus was a real person, not everyone does. The range of views about how the story of Jesus developed is just as varied among those who don't believe that Jesus existed as it is among those who think that Jesus did exist. The range of views about Jesus can perhaps be presented on a spectrum as follows:



This spectrum can be defined in more detail along the following lines, knowing that every particular view of Jesus is not represented in this outline:

1. The Gospels are inerrant and absolutely historically true. Jesus is the "Son of God" who was predicted by the Hebrew scriptures, who came to earth in human form,

- was born of a virgin, preached, and was crucified by Pilate, then rose from the dead and now sits on the right hand of God. The Gospels are historical eyewitness accounts or based on solid eyewitness accounts.
2. The Gospels are generally true but somewhat exaggerated accounts of a real Jesus who had a following of people who thought he was the Son of God. He wasn't born of a virgin and didn't walk on water or perform miracles or rise from the dead, but the Gospels reflect his true teachings and the basic events of his life, and he was crucified by Pilate. The Gospels come from eye witness accounts mixed with a little legend.
 3. The Gospels are generally true but somewhat exaggerated accounts of a real Jesus who was influential in the region. He may or may not have really been crucified by Pilate. He was later mythologized and elevated in status. The Gospels come from eye witness accounts mixed with legend.
 4. The Gospels are mostly fabricated stories inspired by a real Jesus. The Gospels come almost entirely from legends and scriptures, but are still loosely based on the actions of a real Jesus whom we don't know very much about.
 5. The Gospels are mostly fabricated stories inspired by a real a person or persons from a spectrum of time, perhaps from events as far back as 200 years before the supposed life of Jesus. Over time stories were put together that cobbled various political events and persons into a single "Jesus Christ" figure. The events and teachings in the Gospels are mythologized, but based on real-life events that took place over time and were done by a person or various people. The Gospels come almost entirely from legends and scriptures, but are still based on the actions of some real people, without which the story of Jesus would never have come into existence.
 6. The Gospels are completely fabricated stories based on scripture, legends, and the mystical beliefs of existing Jewish cults. There is no human figure at the center of the Gospel stories at all. The Gospels were generally written in the same manner that most scholars claim, during the late 1st century to early 2nd century, but there is no person at the core of them, whether all of the writers themselves knew it or not.
 7. The Gospels are completely fabricated stories based on pagan myths about figures such as Dionysus and Mithras. The Gospels were written by directly mixing Jewish and non-Jewish religions and beliefs into stories that borrow from both traditions. The meaning of the Gospels has been largely lost and generally has little to do with Judaism.
 8. The Gospels are completely fabricated stories that were intentionally crafted to deceive people, and there is no historical person at their core. The Gospels were really written anywhere from the 2nd century to the 4th century and much of early Christian history has been fabricated. The writers of the Gospels knew that there was no Jesus and the whole crafting of the religion was part of a political tool by Roman Emperors or others of a similar kind.

What I argue for is position 6, with perhaps minor influences from positions 5 and 7, though I would say that any anecdotes that may have been applied to Jesus are completely secondary to the mythical character and that they had no influence on the existence of the story itself, perhaps only adding to an already existing character that originated in the mythical realm. In other words, perhaps some anecdotes were attached to the myth, but not the other way around. An example of this might be the possible use of anecdotes about Jesus son of Ananias by the Gospel writers, though this would have had no bearing on the Jesus Christ of Paul. Jesus son of Ananias was mentioned by the Jewish historian Josephus as a raving maniac who predicted impending doom shortly prior to the outbreak of the Jewish War with Rome that ended with the destruction of Judea in 70 CE. Josephus' description of this Jesus has many similarities with the "Signs of the End of the Age".

The basic argument against the historical existence of Jesus is this:

- There is no evidence which confirms that Jesus Christ did exist. (The intention of this argument is not to argue from absence, but rather to simply show that the possibilities are open to further explanation. In addition, yes, this absence of information is also relevant and does produce an argument from absence, but this absence cannot by itself prove that some "Jesus" did not exist.)
- The "Christ" concept, including all of the fundamental aspects of the Jesus Christ's identity, existed prior to the story of "Jesus". (This is a point that is itself a part of Christian belief, but the significance of this is not typically fully appreciated.)
- The earliest writings about Jesus that we have are incompatible with the existence of a historical figure. (This is a contentious claim, and one that draws the most scrutiny)
- There are theological reasons that explain how a non-historical Jesus Christ would have been historicized, these being developments around the eucharist ritual and a belief that real suffering and a real blood sacrifice were needed to create a "new covenant" or to take away sins. (This again makes use of the Christian understanding of the Jesus story)
- There was widespread disagreement as to the nature and existence of Jesus from the time of the writing of the Gospels. (I contend that we have no evidence of disagreement about the nature of Jesus before the Gospels because A) the movement was so small and B) there was no view of Jesus as a historical figure in the first place)
- The earliest defenders of an earthly flesh and blood historical Jesus came along in the 2nd century, and even at that time none of them were able to provide proof for the existence of Jesus, instead they relied on theological reasoning and scriptures to support their claims, eventually winning out through political force, not the validity of their claims.

That Jesus did not exist, but rather developed from stories and beliefs, is the best explanation for these points and many other details of the Jesus story and early Christian history.

The argument against the historical existence of Jesus, in order to be useful, must not simply proclaim that we don't have evidence for Jesus or that the story of Jesus is unbelievable, but rather to show that "Jesus Christ" is a pure myth it must be shown that a purely mythical development of the Jesus story is the best explanation for the facts that we have about early Christian history.

The Jesus Christ that we are presented with by every Christian source, from Paul to the Gospels to the later Epistles, and even the so-called "heretical" sources, is a larger than life figure. This same Jesus, however, is essentially absent from the historical record. That the Gospels are accurate and Jesus was "the Son of God" accounts for Jesus being larger than life, but is incompatible with the fact that he is absent from history. That Jesus was a minor figure, a "marginal Jew", explains why Jesus is absent from the historical record, but fails to explain why or how such an insignificant person could have quickly become seen as the most important being in the universe. That Jesus Christ is a pure myth is the only explanation that is consistent with him being both larger than life and absent from history.

Before getting to a discussion of the case against Jesus, however, we first need to familiarize ourselves with some of the Jewish literature and ideas that existed shortly prior to the supposed life of Jesus.

Of Angels, Heaven, Visions, Sacrifices, Passion, and Ecstasy

Since Paul is our first acknowledged source of information about Jesus, it is critically important to understand the worldviews that existed at the time and place that Paul began his preaching. Not understanding how people thought at that time, and how Paul likely thought, is one of the biggest stumbling blocks that people have to understanding how a "mythical" Jesus would have been conceived.

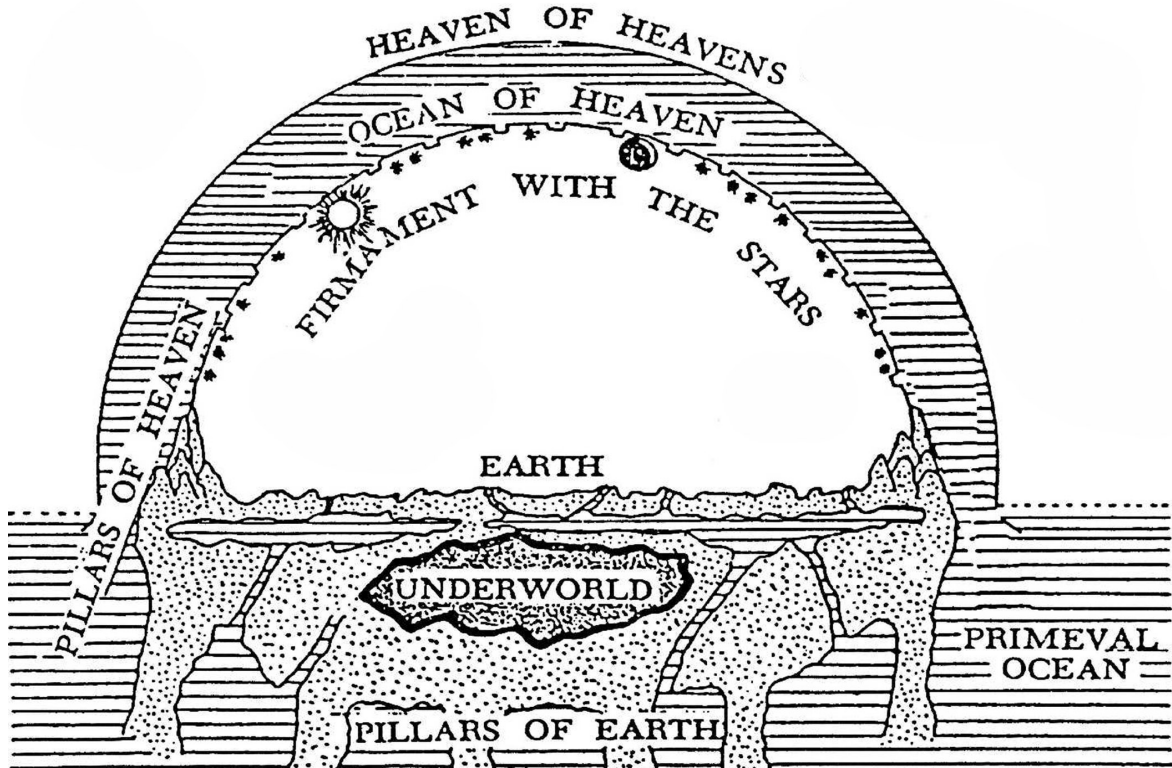
Today most people have a very "supernatural" concept of heaven, as perhaps some place that exists outside of space and time which you can not physically find in our universe. Most people today have this view of heaven because of the fact that we have been to outer space, we have powerful telescopes that look out into the stars, we have photographs of Earth taken from the moon, etc. *We know* that "heaven" doesn't exist up in the clouds, but that wasn't the case during Paul's time among people like Paul and his followers. To these people heaven was a real physical place that existed just beyond the clouds and, in theory, if you could climb a high enough mountain you could probably throw rocks into heaven whence you might risk hitting an angel and getting him angry at you. If you were either really lucky or really unfortunate an angel might fly down to earth on his wings and pick you up and literally take you up past the clouds into heaven where you could walk around and spy on various beings.

Heaven, Hades, and Tartarus were just as real to these people as the sea floor and the moon are to us today. People, from Greek materialists to Platonic philosophers to religious fanatics, believed that images from the heavens and of gods, angels, and demons could literally be, and were, projected to people on earth. The idea of "supernatural" really did not exist at this time as we know it today. To these people everything was natural. Even Greek materialists who rejected religion believed that the visions that people saw in dreams, ideas crafted in people's imaginations, and the unexplained phenomenon that people experienced such as hallucinations, all stemmed from real beings and that if you had a dream about a demon with horns or someone claimed to have seen an angel with wings, then these things had to have really existed and their images were brought projected to that person.

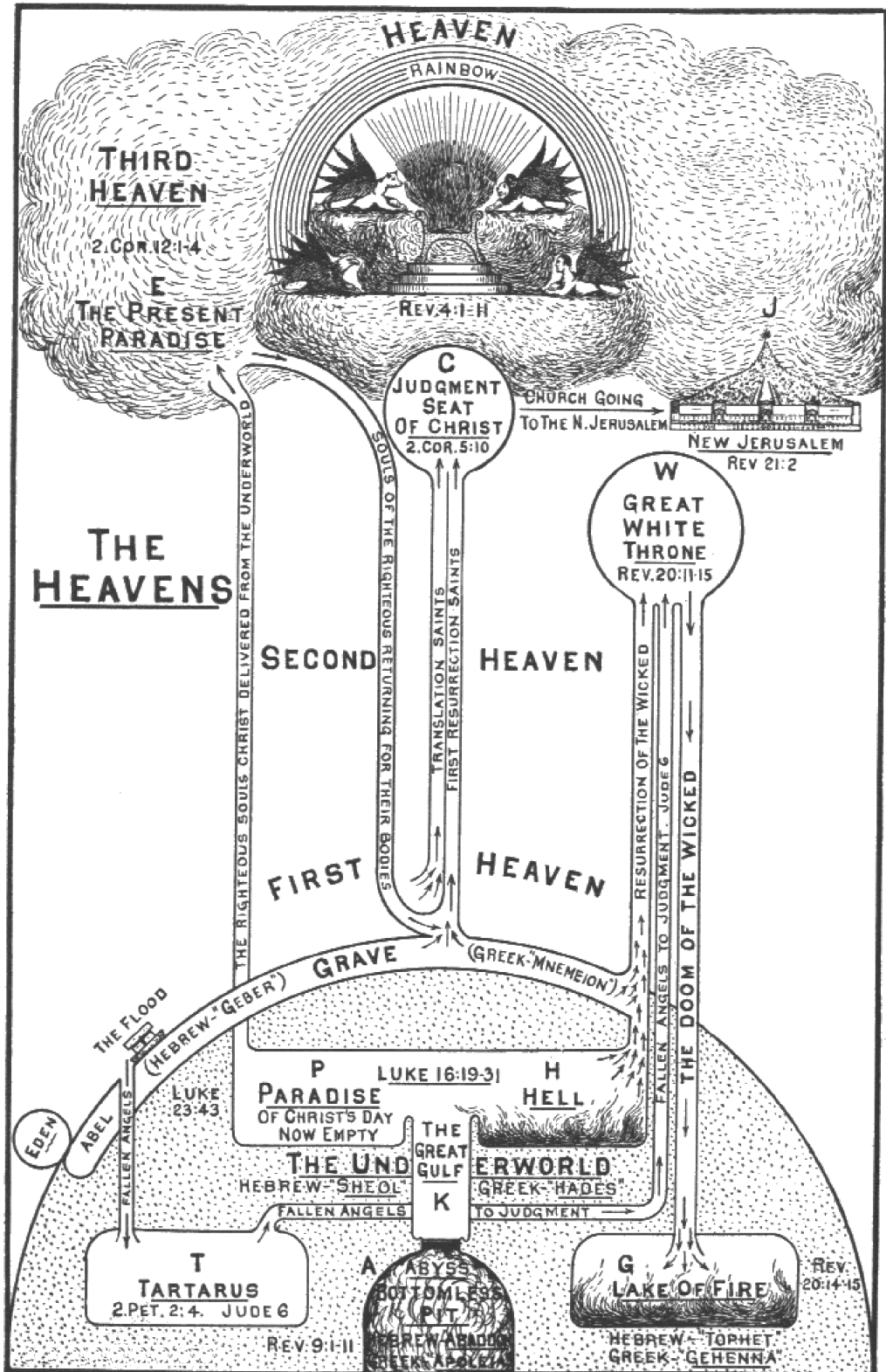
Spirits, or souls, to these people were very real. Some viewed the soul as material and others viewed it as immaterial, but though there were distinctions between "material" and "immaterial" worlds, neither the material nor the immaterial worlds were viewed as "supernatural" or "unnatural", this was simply how the world operated and worked and existed. The modern concept of "supernatural" didn't really develop until after Newton and others had defined "natural laws" that governed how the world works. Then the idea of "supernatural" became anything that was conceived to violate these laws, but prior to the definition of these laws there was no significant distinction between "natural" and "supernatural".

The following diagram depicts early Jewish cosmology. This is the cosmology of Genesis,

where the earth was flat and covered by a dome which protected the earth and the sky from the waters outside the earth, which was where rain came from. The heaven of God and the angels physically existed just outside the ocean of heaven.



By the 1st century CE, however, cosmology in the region had changed. There were in fact many different views of cosmology, from a spherical earth floating in a purely material infinite universe, to a flat earth still held up by pillars and covered by a dome, but we know that a popular view among Hellenistic Jews at that time was a view similar to the one pictured on the following page, of a multi-levelled heaven above the earth.



In some Jewish stories of the era we are presented with a seven layer heaven, in others a five layer heaven, and by Paul and other Christians we hear of a three layer heaven. The previous diagram, based on the Bible, probably closely represents the view of heaven that Paul literally believed in. As far as Paul was concerned the clouds were the midway point between the heavens and earth. As far as Paul was concerned these heavens were populated by many different beings, including angels and demons, and people could literally travel to these heavens and people on earth could literally have visions of events taking place in these heavens.

Plato tells us something of this in the 4th century BCE. Plato's cosmology would later go on to influence many people and cultures throughout the region and his views (or views similar to his) on afterlife, in various altered forms, were prevalent throughout the Mediterranean among both Jews and non-Jews by the 1st century.

These things being thus constituted, when the dead arrive at the place to which their demon leads them severally, first of all they are judged, as well those who have lived well and piously, as those who have not. And those who appear to have passed a middle kind of life, proceeding to Acheron, and embarking in the vessels they have, on these arrive at the lake, and there dwell; and when they are purified, and have suffered punishment for the iniquities they may have committed, they are set free, and each receives the reward of his good deeds, according to his deserts. But those who appear to be incurable, through the magnitude of their offenses, either from having committed many and great sacrileges, or many unjust and lawless murders, or other similar crimes, these a suitable destiny hurls into Tartarus, whence they never come forth. But those who appear to have been guilty of curable yet great offenses--such as those who, through anger, have committed any violence against father or mother, and have lived the remainder of their life in a state of penitence, or they who have become homicides in a similar manner--these must, of necessity, fall into Tartarus. But after they have fallen, and have been there for a year, the wave casts them forth, the homicides into Cocytus, but the parricides and matricides into Pyriphlegethon. But when, being borne along, they arrive at the Acherusian lake, there they cry out to and invoke, some those whom they slew, others those whom they injured, and, invoking them, they entreat and implore them to suffer them to go out into the lake, and to receive them, and if they persuade them, they go out, and are freed from their sufferings, but if not, they are borne back to Tartarus, and thence again to the rivers. And they do not cease from suffering this until they have persuaded those whom they have injured, for this sentence

was imposed on them by the judges. **But those who are found to have lived an eminently holy life, these are they who, being freed and set at large from these regions in the earth as from a prison, arrive at the pure abode above, and dwell on the upper parts of the earth.** And among these, they who have sufficiently purified themselves by philosophy shall live without bodies, throughout all future time, and shall arrive at habitations yet more beautiful than these which it is neither easy to describe, nor at present is there sufficient time for the purpose.
- *PHÆDO*; Plato, 4th century BCE

From the 2nd century BCE through the 2nd century CE we find Jewish apocalyptic and messianic writings that discuss visions of heaven, prophecies of the future, coming saviors, atonement sacrifices, wars in the heavens, retributions of God, and many of other things. It is important to note here that the term apocalypse is popularly misunderstood today to mean "end of the world", but the term apocalypse really means "lifting of the veil", or revelation, typically applied to claimed literal visions, which in Jewish literature during this time were often visions of the end of the world. The New Testament book called Revelation, or *Apocalypse of John*, is one such writing and is specifically about Jesus Christ, but there were many similar writings about other figures as well, and these writings provide us with the worldview of the time and place of the rise of the Jesus story.

Important writings from this period, both Jewish and Christian, include *The Book of Daniel*, *Martyrdom of Isaiah*, *The Book of Enoch*, *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, *Apocalypse of Elijah*, *Assumption of Moses*, *Testament of Isaac*, *Apocalypse of Adam*, *Apocalypse of John* (The Book of Revelation), *Apocalypse of Sedrach*, *Word and Revelation of Esdras*, and others including various writings from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Here are some critical sections from a few of these works. First we will look at *The Book of Daniel*, which is the only apocalyptic writing that is a part of the "Old Testament". It was also included in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew writings.

Daniel 7:

1 In the first year of King Belshazzar of Babylon, **Daniel had a dream and visions of his head as he lay in bed. Then he wrote down the dream:** 2 **I, Daniel, saw in my vision by night the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea,** 3 **and four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another.** 4 The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then, as I watched, its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a human being; and a human mind was given to it. 5 Another beast appeared, a second one, that looked like a bear. It was raised up on one side, had three tusks in its mouth among its teeth and was told, 'Arise, devour many bodies!' 6 After this, as I watched,

another appeared, like a leopard. The beast had four wings of a bird on its back and four heads; and dominion was given to it. 7 After this I saw in the visions by night a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth and was devouring, breaking in pieces, and stamping what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that preceded it, and it had ten horns. 8 I was considering the horns, when another horn appeared, a little one coming up among them; to make room for it, three of the earlier horns were plucked up by the roots. There were eyes like human eyes in this horn, and a mouth speaking arrogantly.

**9 As I watched,
thrones were set in place,
and an Ancient One took his throne;**

his clothing was white as snow,
and the hair of his head like pure wool;
his throne was fiery flames,
and its wheels were burning fire.

10 A stream of fire issued
and flowed out from his presence.
A thousand thousand served him,
and ten thousand times ten thousand stood
attending him.

**The court sat in judgment,
and the books were opened.**

11 I watched then because of the noise of the arrogant words that the horn was speaking. And as I watched, the beast was put to death, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. 12 As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. 13 **As I**

**watched in the night visions,
I saw one like a son of man
coming with the clouds of heaven.
And he came to the Ancient One
and was presented before him.**

14 To him was given dominion
and glory and kingship,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him.

**His dominion is an everlasting dominion
that shall not pass away,
and his kingship is one
that shall never be destroyed.**

...

Daniel 8:

15 When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I tried to understand it. Then someone appeared standing before me, having the appearance of a man, 16 and I heard a human voice by the Ulai, calling, 'Gabriel, help this man understand the vision.' 17 So he came near where I stood; and when he came, I became frightened and fell prostrate. But he said to me, '**Understand, O mortal, that the vision is for the time of the end.**'

...

Daniel 9:

20 While I was speaking, and was praying and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God on behalf of the holy mountain of my God— 21 **while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen before in a vision, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice.** 22 He came and said to me, 'Daniel, I have now come out to give you wisdom and understanding. 23 **At the beginning of your supplications a word went out, and I have come to declare it, for you are greatly beloved.** So consider the word and understand the vision:

24 'Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city: to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy one. 25 **Know therefore and understand: from the time that the word went out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the time of an anointed prince,** there shall be seven weeks; and for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with streets and moat, but in a troubled time. 26 **After the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing, and the troops of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.** Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. 27 He shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall make sacrifice and offering cease; and in their place shall be an abomination that desolates, until the decreed end is poured out upon the desolator.'

...

Daniel 10:

2 At that time I, Daniel, had been mourning for three weeks. 3 I had eaten no rich food, no meat or wine had entered my mouth, and I had not anointed myself at all,

for the full three weeks. 4 On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river (that is, the Tigris), 5 **I looked up and saw a man clothed in linen, with a belt of gold from Uphaz around his waist.** 6 **His body was like beryl, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the roar of a multitude.** 7 **I, Daniel, alone saw the vision; the people who were with me did not see the vision, though a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled and hid themselves.** 8 So I was left alone to see this great vision.

...

15 While he was speaking these words to me, I turned my face towards the ground and was speechless. 16 Then one in human form touched my lips, and I opened my mouth to speak, and said to the one who stood before me, **'My lord, because of the vision such pains have come upon me that I retain no strength.**

...

Daniel 12:

1 **'At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise.** There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. 2 **Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.** 3 **Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the dome, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.** 4 **But you, Daniel, keep the words secret and the book sealed until the time of the end.** Many shall be running back and forth, and evil shall increase.'

5 Then I, Daniel, looked, and two others appeared, one standing on this bank of the stream and one on the other. 6 **One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was upstream, 'How long shall it be until the end of these wonders?'** 7 **The man clothed in linen, who was upstream, raised his right hand and his left hand towards heaven. And I heard him swear by the one who lives for ever that it would be for a time, two times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end, all these things would be accomplished.** 8 I heard but could not understand; so I said, 'My lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?' 9 He said, 'Go your way, Daniel, for the words are to remain secret and

sealed until the time of the end. 10 Many shall be purified, cleansed, and refined, but the wicked shall continue to act wickedly. None of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand. 11 From the time that the regular burnt-offering is taken away and the abomination that desolates is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days. 12 Happy are those who persevere and attain the thousand three hundred and thirty-five days. 13 **But you, go your way, and rest; you shall rise for your reward at the end of the days.'**

In the quotation above I have mostly included the story elements that relate most to the writings of Paul and the Jesus story, though there are also many story elements which I did not include that have no relevance to the Jesus story. The revelations of Daniel related to military conflict and a military leader of the Jews. *The Book of Daniel* is set in the 6th century BCE, but it was actually composed in the 2nd century BCE and it was not actually written by someone named Daniel, just as *The Book of Enoch* was not written by Enoch. Unlike the later ideas of Christianity, *The Book of Daniel* is a highly nationalistic work, intended for a purely Jewish audience.

The *Harper Collins NRSV Study Bible* has this to say about *The Book of Daniel*:

The book as a whole is usually described as an apocalypse, a genre in which revelation is mediated in a narrative framework to a human recipient through otherworldly beings and that discloses a heavenly world and a coming judgment. Apocalypses often use conventions such as pseudonymity and employ a variety of literary forms.

We can now look at *The Book of Enoch*, written shortly after *The Book of Daniel*, and not included in the Septuagint or the Old Testament. *The Book of Enoch* is quite long. In *The Book of Enoch*, Enoch is a scribe of "the great Lord and King of peace" who documents the punishments of angels and rulers of the age. In *The Book of Enoch* the evil angels are cast into the eternal fire and the Son of man comes to establish a new reign of the righteous for ever and ever.

1 The word of the blessing of Enoch, how he blessed the elect and the righteous, who were to exist in the time of trouble; rejecting all the wicked and ungodly. **Enoch, a righteous man, who was with God, answered and spoke, while his eyes were open, and while he saw a holy vision in the heavens. This the angels showed me.**

2 From them I heard all things, and understood what I saw; that which will not take place in this generation, but in a generation which is to succeed at a distant period, on account of the elect.

3 **Upon their account I spoke and conversed with him, who**

will go forth from his habitation, the Holy and Mighty One, the God of the world:

4 Who will hereafter tread upon Mount Sinai; appear with his hosts; and be manifested in the strength of his power from heaven.

5 All shall be afraid, and the Watchers be terrified.

6 Great fear and trembling shall seize them, even to the ends of the earth. The lofty mountains shall be troubled, and the exalted hills depressed, melting like a honeycomb in the flame. **The earth shall be immersed, and all things which are in it perish; while judgment shall come upon all, even upon all the righteous:**

7 **But to them shall he give peace: he shall preserve the elect, and towards them exercise clemency.**

8 **Then shall all belong to God; be happy and blessed; and the splendor of the Godhead shall illuminate them.**

...

1 It happened after the sons of men had multiplied in those days, **that daughters were born to them, elegant and beautiful.**

2 **And when the angels, the sons of heaven, beheld them, they became enamored of them, saying to each other, Come, let us select for ourselves wives from the progeny of men, and let us beget children.**

3 Then their leader Samyaza said to them; I fear that you may perhaps be indisposed to the performance of this enterprise;

4 And that I alone shall suffer for so grievous a crime.

5 But they answered him and said; We all swear;

6 And bind ourselves by mutual execrations, that we will not change our intention, but execute our projected undertaking.

7 Then they swore all together, and all bound themselves by mutual execrations. Their whole number was two hundred, who descended upon Ardis, which is the top of mount Armon.

8 That mountain therefore was called Armon, because they had sworn upon it, and bound themselves by mutual execrations.

9 These are the names of their chiefs: Samyaza, who was their leader, Urakabameel, Akibeel, Tamiel, Ramuel, Danel, Azkeel, Saraknyal, Asael, Armers, Batraal, Anane, Zavebe, Samsaveel, Ertael, Turel, Yomyael, Arazyal. These were the prefects of the two hundred angels, and the remainder were all with them.

10 Then they took wives, each choosing for himself; whom they began to approach, and with whom they cohabited; teaching them sorcery, incantations, and the dividing of

roots and trees.

11 And the women conceiving brought forth giants,
12 Whose stature was each three hundred cubits. These
devoured all which the labor of men produced; until it
became impossible to feed them;

13 When they turned themselves against men, in order to
devour them;

14 And began to injure birds, beasts, reptiles, and
fishes, to eat their flesh one after another, and to drink
their blood.

15 Then the earth reprovved the unrighteous.

...

1 Then Michael and Gabriel, Raphael, Suryal, and Uriel,
looked down from heaven, and saw the quantity of blood
which was shed on earth, and all the iniquity which was
done upon it, and said one to another, It is the voice of
their cries;

2 The earth deprived of her children has cried even to the
gate of heaven.

3 And now to you, O you holy one of heaven, the souls of
men complain, saying, Obtain Justice for us with the Most
High. Then they said to their Lord, the King, You are Lord
of lords, God of gods, King of kings. The throne of your
glory is for ever and ever, and for ever and ever is your
name sanctified and glorified. You are blessed and
glorified.

...

6 Again the Lord said to Raphael, Bind Azazyel hand and
foot; cast him into darkness; and opening the desert which
is in Dudael, cast him in there.

7 Throw upon him hurled and pointed stones, covering him
with darkness;

8 There shall he remain for ever; cover his face, that he
may not see the light.

**9 And in the great day of judgment let him be cast into
the fire.**

10 Restore the earth, which the angels have corrupted; and
announce life to it, that I may revive it.

11 All the sons of men shall not perish in consequence of
every secret, by which the Watchers have destroyed, and
which they have taught, their offspring.

12 All the earth has been corrupted by the effects of the
teaching of Azazyel. To him therefore ascribe the whole
crime.

13 To Gabriel also the Lord said, Go to the biters, to the
reprobates, to the children of fornication; and destroy
the children of fornication, the offspring of the

Watchers, from among men; bring them forth, and excite them one against another. Let them perish by mutual slaughter; for length of days shall not be theirs.

14 They shall all entreat you, but their fathers shall not obtain their wishes respecting them; for they shall hope for eternal life, and that they may live, each of them, five hundred years.

15 To Michael likewise the Lord said, Go and announce his crime to Samyaza, and to the others who are with him, **who have been associated with women, that they might be polluted with all their impurity.** And when all their sons shall be slain, when they shall see the perdition of their beloved, bind them for seventy generations underneath the earth, **even to the day of judgment, and of consummation, until the judgment, the effect of which will last for ever,** be completed.

16 **Then shall they be taken away into the lowest depths of the fire in torments; and in confinement shall they be shut up for ever.**

17 Immediately after this shall he, together with them, burn and perish; they shall be bound until the consummation of many generations.

18 Destroy all the souls addicted to dalliance, and the offspring of the Watchers, for they have tyrannized over mankind.

19 **Let every oppressor perish from the face of the earth;**

20 **Let every evil work be destroyed;**

21 The plant of righteousness and of rectitude appear, and its produce become a blessing.

22 Righteousness and rectitude shall be forever planted with delight.

23 And then shall all the saints give thanks, and live until they have begotten a thousand children, while the whole period of their youth, and their sabbaths shall be completed in peace. In those days all the earth shall be cultivated in righteousness; it shall be wholly planted with trees, and filled with benediction; every tree of delight shall be planted in it.

24 In it shall vines be planted; and the vine which shall be planted in it shall yield fruit to satiety; every seed, which shall be sown in it, shall produce for one measure a thousand; and one measure of olives shall produce ten presses of oil.

25 **Purify the earth from all oppression, from all injustice, from all crime, from all impiety, and from all the pollution which is committed upon it. Exterminate them from the earth.**

26 Then shall all the children of men be righteous, and all nations shall pay me divine honors, and bless me; and all shall adore me.

27 The earth shall be cleansed from all corruption, from every crime, from all punishment, and from all suffering; neither will I again send a deluge upon it from generation to generation for ever.

28 In those days I will open the treasures of blessing which are in heaven, that I may cause them to descend upon earth, and upon all the works and labor of man.

29 Peace and equity shall associate with the sons of men all the days of the world, in every generation of it.

...

1 Thus the Lord commanded the kings, the princes, the exalted, and those who dwell on earth, saying, Open your eyes, and lift up your horns, if you are capable of comprehending the Elect One.

2 The Lord of spirits sat upon the throne of his glory.

3 And the spirit of righteousness was poured out over him.

4 The word of his mouth shall destroy all the sinners and all the ungodly, who shall perish at his presence.

5 In that day shall all the kings, the princes, the exalted, and those who possess the earth, stand up, behold, and perceive, that he is sitting on the throne of his glory; that before him the saints shall be judged in righteousness;

6 And that nothing, which shall be spoken before him, shall be spoken in vain.

7 Trouble shall come upon them, as upon a woman in travail, whose labor is severe, when her child comes to the mouth of the womb, and she finds it difficult to bring forth.

8 One portion of them shall look upon another. They shall be astonished, and shall humble their countenance;

9 And trouble shall seize them, when they shall behold this Son of woman sitting upon the throne of his glory.

10 Then shall the kings, the princes, and all who possess the earth, glorify him who has dominion over all things, him who was concealed; for from the beginning the Son of man existed in secret, whom the Most High preserved in the presence of his power, and revealed to the elect.

11 He shall sow the congregation of the saints, and of the elect; and all the elect shall stand before him in that day.

12 All the kings, the princes, the exalted, and those who rule over all the earth, shall fall down on their faces before him, and shall worship him.

13 **They shall fix their hopes on this Son of man, shall pray to him, and petition him for mercy.**

14 Then shall the Lord of spirits hasten to expel them from his presence. Their faces shall be full of confusion, and their faces shall darkness cover. The angels shall take them to punishment, that vengeance may be inflicted on those who have oppressed his children and his elect. And they shall become an example to the saints and to his elect. Through them shall these be made joyful; for the anger of the Lord of spirits shall rest upon them.

15 Then the sword of the Lord of spirits shall be drunk with their blood; but the saints and elect shall be safe in that day; nor the face of the sinners and the ungodly shall they thenceforwards behold.

16 The Lord of spirits shall remain over them:

17 **And with this Son of man shall they dwell, eat, lie down, and rise up, for ever and ever.**

...

1 **Afterwards my spirit was concealed, ascending into the heavens. I beheld the sons of the holy angels treading on flaming fire, whose garments and robes were white, and whose countenances were transparent as crystal.**

2 I saw two rivers of fire glittering like the hyacinth.

3 Then I fell on my face before the Lord of spirits.

4 And Michael, one of the archangels, took me by my right hand, raised me up, and brought me out to where was every secret of mercy and secret of righteousness.

5 **He showed me all the hidden things of the extremities of heaven, all the receptacles of the stars, and the splendours of all, from whence they went forth before the face of the holy.**

6 **And he concealed the spirit of Enoch in the heaven of heavens.**

7 There I beheld, in the midst of that light, a building raised with stones of ice;

8 And in the midst of these stone vibrations of living fire. My spirit saw around the circle of this flaming habitation, on one of its extremities, that there were rivers full of living fire, which encompassed it.

9 Then the Seraphim, the Cherubim, and Ophanin surrounded it: these are those who never sleep, but watch the throne of his glory.

10 **And I beheld angels innumerable, thousands of thousands, and myriads and myriads, who surrounded that habitation.**

11 Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, Phanuel and the holy angels who were in the heavens above, went in and out of it.

Michael, Raphael, and Gabriel went out of that habitation, and holy angels innumerable.

12 With them was the Ancient of days, whose head was white as wool, and pure, and his robe was indescribable.

13 **Then I fell upon my face, while all my flesh was dissolved, and my spirit became changed.**

14 I cried out with a loud voice, with a powerful spirit, blessing, glorifying, and exalting.

15 And those blessings, which proceeded from my mouth, became acceptable in the presence of the Ancient of days.

16 The Ancient of days came with Michael and Gabriel, Raphael and Phanuel, with thousands of thousands, and myriads and myriads, which would not be numbered.

17 **Then that angel came to me, and with his voice saluted me, saying, You are the Son of man, who art born for righteousness, and righteousness has rested upon you.**

18 The righteousness of the Ancient of days shall not forsake you.

19 **He said, On you shall he confer peace in the name of the existing world; for from thence has peace gone forth since the world was created.**

20 **And thus shall it happen to you for ever and ever.**

21 **All who shall exist, and who shall walk in your path of righteousness, shall not forsake you for ever.**

22 **With you shall be their habitations, with you their lot; nor from you shall they be separated for ever and ever.**

23 **And thus shall length of days be with the Son of man.**

24 Peace shall be to the righteous; and the path of integrity shall the righteous pursue, in the name of the Lord of spirits, for ever and ever.

- *The Book of Enoch*, 2nd - 1st century BCE

Clearly, this apocalyptic work contains many of the themes that we also find in the Gospel stories, and even in the ideas of Paul. There are several important sections here that we will come back to as we discuss the writings of Paul.

We can now look at *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, written some time in either the 1st century BCE or the 1st century CE.

And a spirit took me and brought me up into the fifth heaven. And I saw angels who are called "lords." And the diadem was set upon them in the Holy Spirit, and the throne of each of them was sevenfold more [brilliant] than the light of the rising sun. [And they were dwelling in the temples of salvation and singing hymns to the ineffable God.]

...

I saw a soul which five thousand angels punished and guarded. They took it to the East and they brought it to the West. They beat its ... they gave it a hundred ... lashes for each one daily. I was afraid and I cast myself upon my face so that my joints dissolved. The angel helped me. He said unto me, "Be strong, O one who will triumph, and prevail so that thou wilt triumph over the accuser and thou wilt come up from Hades." And after I arose I said, "Who is this whom they are punishing?" He said unto me, "This is a soul which was found in its lawlessness." And before it attained to repenting it was visited, and taken out of its body. **Truly, I, Zephaniah, saw these things in my vision.**

...

But I went with the angel of the Lord, and I looked in front of me and I saw gates. Then when I approached them I discovered that they were bronze gates. The angel touched them and they opened before him. I entered with him and found its whole square like a beautiful city, and I walked in its midst. Then the angel of the Lord transformed himself beside me in that place.

Now I looked at them, and I discovered that they were bronze gates and bronze bolts and iron bars. Now my mouth was shut therein. I beheld the bronze gates in front of me as fire was being cast forth for about fifty stadia.

...

Then I arose and stood, and I saw a great angel standing before me with his face shining like the rays of the sun in its glory since his face is like that which is perfected in its glory. And he was girded as if a golden girdle were upon his breast. His feet were like bronze which is melted in a fire. And when I saw him, I rejoiced, for I thought that the Lord Almighty had come to visit me. I fell upon my face, and I worshiped him. He said to me, "Take heed. Worship me not. **I am not the Lord Almighty, but am the great angel, Eremiel, who is over the abyss and Hades, the one in which all of the souls are imprisoned from the end of the Flood, which came upon the earth, until this day.**"

...

Then the great angel came to me with the golden trumpet in his hand, and he blew it up unto heaven. Heaven opened from the place where the sun rises to where it sets, from the north to the south. I saw the sea which I had seen at the bottom of Hades. Its waves came up to the clouds. I saw all the souls sinking in it. I saw some whose hands were bound to their neck, with their hands and feet being

fettered. I said, "Who are these?" He said unto me, "These are the ones who were bribed and they were given gold and silver until the souls of men were led astray." And I saw others covered with mats of fire. I said, "Who are these?" He said unto me, "These are the ones who give money at interest, and they receive interest for interest." And I also saw some blind ones crying out. And I was amazed when I saw all these works of God. I said, "Who are these?" He said unto me, "These are catechumens who heard the word of God, but they were not perfected in the work which they heard." And I said unto him, "Then have they not repentance here?" He said, "Yes," I said, "How long?" He said unto me, "Until the day when the Lord will judge." And I saw others with their hair on them. **I said, "Then there is hair and body in this place?" He said, "Yes, the Lord gives body and hair to them as he desires.**

...

And again the great angel cometh forth with the golden trumpet in his hand blowing over the earth. They hear [it] from the place of the sunrise to the place of the sunset and from the southern regions to the northern regions. And again he blows [it] up unto heaven and its sound is heard. I said, "O Lord, why left thou me not until I saw them all?" **He said unto me, "I have not authority to show them unto thee until the Lord Almighty riseth up in his wrath to destroy the earth and the heavens. They will see and be disturbed, and they will all cry out, saying, 'All flesh which is ascribed to Thee we will give unto Thee on the day of the Lord.' Who will stand in His presence when He riseth in His wrath [to destroy] the earth [and the heavens] Every tree which groweth upon the earth will be plucked up with its roots and fall down. And every high tower and the birds which fly will fall...**

- *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, ~1st century BCE

As you can see, here we have a story about Zephaniah being taken up to the fifth heaven, which probably was seen as the upper most heaven by the writer, where the writer talks of seeing angels who are called "lords", basically rulers. The writer also swears that what he is saying is true and that he really saw all these things. In the end we are told of the coming destruction of the world by the Lord.

We can now move on to *The Martyrdom of Isaiah*, which not only features various heavenly powers directing events on earth, but also the prophet Isaiah who predicts his own death and is then killed according to his own prediction in a scene in which he is mocked and tormented.

Chapter 1:

1. AND it came to pass in the twenty-sixth year of the reign

of Hezekiah king of Judah that he called Manasseh his son. Now he was his only one.

2. **And he called him into the presence of Isaiah the son of Amoz the prophet, and into the presence of Josab the son of Isaiah, in order to deliver unto him the words of righteousness which the king himself had seen:**

3. **And of the eternal judgments and torments of Gehenna, and of the prince of this world, and of his angels, and his authorities and his powers.**

4. And the words of the faith of the Beloved which he himself had seen in the fifteenth year of his reign during his illness.

5. And he delivered unto him the written words which Samnas the scribe had written, and also those which Isaiah, the son of Amoz, had given to him, and also to the prophets, **that they might write and store up with him what he himself had seen in the king's house regarding the judgment of the angels, and the destruction of this world, and regarding the garments of the saints and their going forth, and regarding their transformation and the persecution and ascension of the Beloved.**

6. In the twentieth year of the reign of Hezekiah, Isaiah had seen the words of this prophecy and had delivered them to Josab his son. And whilst he (Hezekiah) gave commands, Josab the son of Isaiah standing by.

7. Isaiah said to Hezekiah the king, but not in the presence of Manasseh only did he say unto him: `As the Lord liveth, and the Spirit which speaketh in me liveth, all these commands and these words will be made of none effect by Manasseh thy son, and through the agency of his hands I shall depart mid the torture of my body.

8. And Sammael Malchira will serve Manasseh, and execute all his desire, and he will become a follower of Beliar rather than of me:

9. **And many in Jerusalem and in Judea he will cause to abandon the true faith, and Beliar will dwell in Manasseh, and by his hands I shall be sawn asunder.'**

10. And when Hezekiah heard these words he wept very bitterly, and rent his garments, and placed earth upon his head, and fell on his face.

11. And Isaiah said unto him: "The counsel of Sammael against Manasseh is consummated: nought will avail thee."

12. And on that day Hezekiah resolved in his heart to slay Manasseh his son.

13. And Isaiah said to Hezekiah: "The Beloved hath made of none effect thy design, and the purpose of thy heart will not be accomplished, for with this calling have I been

called and I shall inherit the heritage of the Beloved."

...

Chapter 2:

7. And, when Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw the lawlessness which was being perpetrated in Jerusalem and the worship of Satan and his wantonness, **he withdrew from Jerusalem and settled in Bethlehem of Judah.**

...

Chapter 3:

6. And Belchira accused Isaiah and the prophets who were with him, saying: 'Isaiah and those who are with him prophesy against Jerusalem and against the cities of Judah that they shall be laid waste and [against the children of Judah and] Benjamin also that they shall go into captivity, and also against thee, O lord the king, that thou shalt go [bound] with hooks and iron chains':

7. But they prophesy falsely against Israel and Judah.

8. And Isaiah himself hath said: 'I see more than Moses the prophet.'

9. But Moses said: 'No man can see God and live'; and Isaiah hath said: 'I have seen God and behold I live.'

10. Know, therefore, O king, that he is lying. And Jerusalem also he hath called Sodom, and the princes of Judah and Jerusalem he hath declared to be the people of Gomorrah. And he brought many accusations against Isaiah and the prophets before Manasseh.

11. **But Beliar dwelt in the heart of Manasseh and in the heart of the princes of Judah** and Benjamin and of the eunuchs and of the councilors of the king.

...

Chapter 5:

2. **And when Isaiah was being sawn in sunder, Belchira stood up, accusing him, and all the false prophets stood up, laughing and rejoicing because of Isaiah.**

3. **And Belchira, with the aid of Mechembechus, stood up before Isaiah, [laughing] deriding;**

4. And Belchira said to Isaiah: 'Say, "I have lied in all that I have spoken, and likewise the ways of Manasseh are good and right.'

5. And the ways also of Belchira and of his associates are good."

6. And this he said to him when he began to be sawn in sunder.

7. But Isaiah was [absorbed] in a vision of the Lord, and though his eyes were open, he saw them (not).

8. And Belchira spoke thus to Isaiah: "Say what I say unto thee and I will turn their hearts, and I will compel

Manasseh and the princes of Judah and the people and all Jerusalem to reverence thee.

9. And Isaiah answered and said: "So far as I have utterance [I say]: Damned and accused be thou and all thy powers and all thy house.

10. For thou canst not take [from me] aught save the skin of my body."

11. And they seized and sawed in sunder Isaiah, the son of Amoz, with a wooden saw.

12. And Manasseh and Belchira and the false prophets and the princes and the people [and] all stood looking on.

13. And to the prophets who were with him he said before he had been sawn in sunder: "Go ye to the region of Tyre and Sidon; for for me only hath God mingled the cup."

14. **And when Isaiah was being sawn in sunder, he neither cried aloud nor wept, but his lips spoke with the Holy Spirit until he was sawn in twain.**

- *The Martyrdom of Isaiah*, ~2nd century BCE

Of special note here is "*the prince of this world, his angels, and authorities and his powers*," which refers to Satan or Beliar and the heavenly and earthly powers that follow him. Scholars universally recognize *The Martyrdom of Isaiah* as a fiction, but the characters in *The Martyrdom of Isaiah*, king Hezekiah and his son, etc., are historical or pseudo-historical, i.e. the author of *The Martyrdom of Isaiah* would have believed that they were historical even if they are not. In *The Martyrdom of Isaiah* we see a pseudo-historical story that involves all of the same elements that the later Jesus story includes.

Getting closer to the time of Christianity we have the *Apocalypse of Adam*. There is disagreement as to whether the *Apocalypse of Adam* was written before or after the advent of Christianity, but it is generally acknowledged to be independent of Christian tradition, even if it were written during the 1st or 2nd century CE, though dating the work is difficult. The work was presumably written some time between the 1st century BCE and the 2nd century CE and is of a Gnostic nature.

Once again, for the third time, the illuminator of knowledge will pass by in great glory, in order to leave (something) of the seed of Noah and the sons of Ham and Japheth - to leave for himself fruit-bearing trees. And he will redeem their souls from the day of death. **For the whole creation that came from the dead earth will be under the authority of death. But those who reflect upon the knowledge of the eternal God in their heart(s) will not perish. For they have not received spirit from this kingdom alone, but they have received (it) from a [...] eternal angel. [...] illuminator [...] will come upon [...] that is dead [...] of Seth. And he will perform signs and wonders in order to scorn the powers and their**

ruler.

Then the god of the powers will be disturbed, saying, "What is the power of this man who is higher than we?" Then he will arouse a great wrath against that man. And the glory will withdraw and dwell in holy houses which it has chosen for itself. And the powers will not see it with their eyes, nor will they see the illuminator either. Then they will punish the flesh of the man upon whom the holy spirit came.

Then the angels and all the generations of the powers will use the name in error, asking, "Where did it (the error) come from?" or "Where did the words of deception, which all the powers have failed to discover, come from?"

Now the first kingdom says of him that he came from [...]. A spirit [...] to heaven. He was nourished in the heavens. He received the glory of that one and the power. He came to the bosom of his mother. And thus he came to the water.

...
The third kingdom says of him that he came from a virgin womb. He was cast out of his city, he and his mother. He was brought to a desert place. He was nourished there. He came and received glory and strength. And thus he came to the water.

The fourth kingdom says of him that he came from a virgin. [...] Solomon sought her, he and Phersalo and Sael and his armies, which had been sent out. Solomon himself sent his army of demons to seek out the virgin. And they did not find the one whom they sought, but the virgin who was given them. It was she whom they fetched. Solomon took her. The virgin became pregnant and gave birth to the child there. She nourished him on a border of the desert. When he had been nourished, he received glory and power from the seed from which he was begotten. And thus he came to the water.

...
But the generation without a king over it says that God chose him from all the aeons. He caused a knowledge of the undefiled one of truth to come to be in him. He said, "Out of a foreign air, from a great aeon, the great illuminator came forth. And he made the generation of those men whom he had chosen for himself shine, so that they could shine upon the whole aeon"

...
Then the peoples will cry out with a great voice, saying, "Blessed is the soul of those men because they have known God with a knowledge of the truth! They shall live

forever, because they have not been corrupted by their desire, along with the angels, nor have they accomplished the works of the powers, but they have stood in his presence in a knowledge of God like light that has come forth from fire and blood.

"But we have done every deed of the powers senselessly. We have boasted in the transgression of all our works. We have cried against the God of truth because all his works [...] is eternal. These are against our spirits. For now we have known that our souls will die the death."

Then a voice came to them, saying "Micheu and Michar and Mnesinous, who are over the holy baptism and the living water, why were you crying out against the living God with lawless voices and tongues without law over them, and souls full of blood and foul deeds? You are full of works that are not of the truth, but your ways are full of joy and rejoicing. Having defiled the water of life, you have drawn it within the will of the powers to whom you have been given to serve them.

"And your thought is not like that of those men whom you persecute [...] desire [...]. Their fruit does not wither. But they will be known up to the great aeons, because the words they have kept, of the God of the aeons, were not committed to the book, nor were they written. But angelic (beings) will bring them, whom all the generations of men will not know. For they will be on a high mountain, upon a rock of truth. Therefore they will be named "The Words of Imperishability and Truth," for those who know the eternal God in wisdom of knowledge and teaching of angels forever, for he knows all things."

These are the revelations which Adam made known to Seth, his son, And his son taught his seed about them. **This is the hidden knowledge of Adam, which he gave to Seth, which is the holy baptism of those who know the eternal knowledge through those born of the word and the imperishable illuminators, who came from the holy seed:** Yesseus, Mazareus, Yessedekus, the Living Water.

- *Apocalypse of Adam*, ~1st century BCE to 2nd century CE

This story is somewhat difficult to understand, but it is about secret knowledge that Adam gave to his son Seth. This story talks about a "god of the powers," something similar to the "rulers" mentioned in the Pauline letters, which we will discuss. The "illuminator of knowledge" is a man who comes into the world that has greater knowledge than the "gods", or rulers of the middle heavens. Thirteen different kingdoms, presumably of the heavens, put forth wrong explanations for where the "illuminator of knowledge" came

from, but then the story says that the "*generation without a king over it,*" again presumably a spiritual ruler, says that the illuminator was chosen by God. The illuminator brings uncorrupted knowledge of God, which brings salvation to those men who receive this knowledge.

Whether this work was written before the supposed time of Jesus or after makes little difference, because it is clearly of an independent tradition that is not affected by Christianity, on this scholars do generally agree. It was, nevertheless, written around the same time that the Christian stories were written and shares similar themes.

Another compelling story in the Hebrew scriptures, while not an apocalyptic story, that in many ways foreshadows the story of the crucifixion of Jesus, is the story of the martyrdom of the seven brothers in 2 Maccabees, which was written some time between the 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE. The account in 2 Maccabees is likely exaggerated or purely fictitious (seven being a "magic number" among Jews of the time) and is used to make theological points and encourage martyrdom. It describes how a mother and her seven children were tortured to death during the reign of the Greek ruler Antiochus.

2 Maccabees 7:

It happened also that seven brothers and their mother were arrested and were being compelled by the king, under torture with whips and thongs, to partake of unlawful swine's flesh. One of them, acting as their spokesman, said, 'What do you intend to ask and learn from us? For we are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors.'

The king fell into a rage, and gave orders to have pans and cauldrons heated. These were heated immediately, and he commanded that the tongue of their spokesman be cut out and that they scalp him and cut off his hands and feet, while the rest of the brothers and the mother looked on. When he was utterly helpless, the king ordered them to take him to the fire, still breathing, and to fry him in a pan. The smoke from the pan spread widely, but the brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die nobly, saying, 'The Lord God is watching over us and in truth has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song that bore witness against the people to their faces, when he said, "And he will have compassion on his slaves."'

After the first brother had died in this way, they brought forward the second for their sport. They tore off the skin of his head with the hair, and asked him, 'Will you eat rather than have your body punished limb by limb?' He replied in the language of his ancestors and said to them, 'No.' Therefore he in turn underwent tortures as the first brother had done. And when he was at his last breath, he

said, 'You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws.'

After him, the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, and said nobly, 'I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again.' As a result the king himself and those with him were astonished at the young man's spirit, for he regarded his sufferings as nothing.

After he too had died, they maltreated and tortured the fourth in the same way. When he was near death, he said, 'One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!'

Next they brought forward the fifth and maltreated him. But he looked at the king, and said, 'Because you have authority among mortals, though you also are mortal, you do what you please. But do not think that God has forsaken our people. Keep on, and see how his mighty power will torture you and your descendants!'

After him they brought forward the sixth. And when he was about to die, he said, 'Do not deceive yourself in vain. **For we are suffering these things on our own account, because of our sins against our own God.** Therefore astounding things have happened. But do not think that you will go unpunished for having tried to fight against God!'

The mother was especially admirable and worthy of honorable memory. Although she saw her seven sons perish within a single day, she bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord. She encouraged each of them in the language of their ancestors. Filled with a noble spirit, she reinforced her woman's reasoning with a man's courage, and said to them, 'I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws.'

...

While she was still speaking, the young man said, 'What

are you waiting for? I will not obey the king's command, but I obey the command of the law that was given to our ancestors through Moses. But you, who have contrived all sorts of evil against the Hebrews, will certainly not escape the hands of God. **For we are suffering because of our own sins.** And if our living Lord is angry for a little while, to rebuke and discipline us, he will again be reconciled with his own slaves. But you, unholy wretch, you most defiled of all mortals, do not be elated in vain and puffed up by uncertain hopes, when you raise your hand against the children of heaven. You have not yet escaped the judgment of the almighty, all-seeing God. **For our brothers after enduring a brief suffering have drunk of ever-flowing life,** under God's covenant; but you, by the judgment of God, will receive just punishment for your arrogance. I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our ancestors, appealing to God to show mercy soon to our nation and by trials and plagues to make you confess that he alone is God, **and through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation.'**

The king fell into a rage, and handled him worse than the others, being exasperated at his scorn. So **he died in his integrity, putting his whole trust in the Lord.**

Last of all, the mother died, after her sons.

4 Maccabees, written after 2 Maccabees and by a different author, comments on the seven martyrs in 2 Maccabees and states that their sacrifice was a "*ransom for the sin of our nation.*"

4 Maccabees 17:

If it were possible for us to paint the history of your religion as an artist might, would not those who first beheld it have shuddered as they saw the mother of the seven children enduring their varied tortures to death for the sake of religion? ... **[T]hey having become, as it were, a ransom for the sin of our nation. And through the blood of those devout ones and their death as an atoning sacrifice,** divine Providence preserved Israel that previously had been mistreated.

The Dead Sea Scrolls from the caves at Qumran, written between the 2nd century BCE and the early 1st century CE, have also yielded a number of messianic writings. One of the interesting messianic writings is a fragment of a hymn from cave 4.

5 [...for]ever a throne of power in the angelic council.
No king of yore will sit therein, neither will their nobles. [...Who can be compared to]

6 [me?] None can compare to my glory, and none has been exalted save myself, and none can accompany me. I sit in heaven, and none

7 [...] I shall be reckoned with the angels, my dwelling is the holy council. My desi[re] is not of the flesh, [for] everything precious to me is in glory of

8 the holy [hab]itation. [W]ho has been accounted despicable like me, yet who is like me in my glory? Who is [...]

9 [...] Who has born[e all] afflictions like me? Who compares to me [in enduri]ng evil? No one is like me and no teaching compares [to my teaching]

- Qumran cave 4, 491 fragment II, Hymn I, Version 2

This is a hymn written in the first person voice of an imagined messiah. The author was describing the messiah through the voice of the messiah, and in this hymn we see motifs that are based on the "suffering servant" passage from the book of Isaiah in the "Old Testament". As we shall later explore, the "suffering servant" passage in Isaiah is also the basis for the character of Jesus Christ in the Gospels. It is also notable that this hymn says that the messiah will not be a king or of nobility.

While not Jewish in origin, the following text, known as the Oracle of Hystaspes, is believed to have originated in the 2nd century BCE from among the Persians and to have become known to Jews and later to Christians. This oracle talks about the coming of a prophet of God (in this case meaning a prophet of the Zoroastrian god Ahura Mazda) who would then be killed by a false prophet who would be called the Son of God. The "Son of God" likely referred to a Roman emperor, but in essence this was an idea similar to that of the later Christian "anti-Christ".

When the close of the times draws nigh, a great prophet shall be sent from God to turn men to the knowledge of God, and he shall receive the power of doing wonderful things. Wherever men shall not hear him, he will shut up the heaven, and cause it to withhold its rains; he will turn their water into blood, and torment them with thirst and hunger; and if any one shall endeavor to injure him, fire shall come forth out of his mouth, and shall burn that man. By these prodigies and powers he shall turn many to the worship of God; and when his works shall be accomplished, another king shall arise out of Syria, born from an evil spirit, the overthrower and destroyer of the human race, who shall destroy that which is left by the former evil, together with himself. **He shall fight against the prophet of God, and shall overcome, and slay him, and shall suffer him to lie unburied; but after the third day he shall come to life again; and while all look on and wonder, he shall be caught up into heaven.** But that king

will not only be most disgraceful in himself, but he will also be a prophet of lies; and he will constitute and call himself God, and will order himself to be worshiped as the Son of God; and power will be given him to do signs and wonders, by the sight of which he may entice men to adore him. He will command fire to come down from heaven, and the sun to stand and leave his course, and an image to speak; and these things shall be done at his word,—by which miracles many even of the wise shall be enticed by him. Then he will attempt to destroy the temple of God, and persecute the righteous people; and there will be distress and tribulation, such as there never has been from the beginning of the world.

- *Divine Institutes (Book VII)*; Lactantius, 4th century

That the prophet of God would be killed and rise again after three days is of course familiar to the Jesus story, but we also see the ideas about the "prophet of lies" reflected in Christian works such as the book of Revelation.

With all of this we have some idea of the cosmology, themes, and beliefs that existed among Hellenistic Jews during the 1st century. The works we have reviewed are representative of the beliefs of the time and place in which the Christian story arose. At this time there was no universal belief in a coming messiah among the Jews, and views of the messiah were widely varied, but certainly among this variety of opinion many of the ideas that we later find in the Jesus story existed.

The only thing new and different in the early Christian story is the name Jesus and the claim of crucifixion, as opposed to being sawn in half or hung or tortured by various other means, as took place in the many other stories that preceded the story of Jesus.

Shortly prior to the development of the story of "Jesus Christ" we already have Jewish stories outside of the "Old Testament" that include the following:

- The titles or designations Son of God, Son of Man, Prince of Peace, Anointed One, King of Kings, etc. (though not always capitalized)
- The Elect (many people and/or angels who will be justified)
- Heavenly powers who fight among themselves in heaven and through the manipulation of events on earth
- Heroes who predict their own death
- Passion narratives
- Promises of immortality
- Descriptions of resurrections
- The coming end of the world
- The coming creation of a new righteous world
- Angels interacting with people on earth
- People having visions (or claiming to have had them) and testifying to their truth
- People claiming to have witnessed amazing events on earth

The Case Against Both Jesus and Christ

The "Christ" concept or a "Christ-like" concept already existed before the story of Jesus. On this basically everyone is agreed, though people who look for the "historical Jesus" tend to downplay this fact.

The belief in a literal "human" Jesus most likely emerged from this concept as eucharist rituals and theology developed around the concept of the "flesh and blood" of Christ and these concepts merged with allegorical narratives about the figure.

What is the basis for the claim that "Jesus never existed"?

Actually, there are many important facts that support this conclusion. First let's look at an outline of some of the major points in this case:

- The earliest writings about Jesus, from Paul and others, contain no details of his life
- Many statements in the letters of Paul only make sense if Paul did not view Jesus Christ as a historical person
- The Gospel of Mark was the first story of Jesus that was written, and all others are dependent on it
- The Gospel of Mark shows clear signs of being written as an allegorical fiction
- Virtually every detail of the life of Jesus comes from "Old Testament" scriptures
- Some of the details of the life of Jesus are based on mistranslations of the Hebrew scriptures
- Jesus' crucifixion on Passover defies historical believability, yet makes perfect sense metaphorically
- The Gospels make many claims that are contradicted by the historical record
- There is not one single writing from or about Jesus during his supposed lifetime
- Philo, a prolific Jewish writer who lived from 20 BCE to 50 CE, wrote extensively about the political and theological movements throughout the Mediterranean, and his views foreshadowed Christian theology, yet he never once wrote anything about Jesus. Not only this, but he actually wrote about political conflicts between the Jews and Pontius Pilate in Judea
- All of the non-Christian references to Jesus can be shown to have either been introduced later by Christian scribes or were originally based on Christian claims
- There is no evidence of any knowledge of a tomb of Jesus (empty or occupied) prior to the Gospel stories
- There were many conflicting beliefs about who Jesus Christ was in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd centuries, including beliefs that he had never existed on earth "in the flesh"
- The Catholics made purely theological arguments as to why Jesus Christ had to have existed "in the flesh"

None of these points are meant to stand on their own, but collectively they provide a very strong argument against the story of Jesus Christ being based on a real person.

The only real source of information that we have about the life of Jesus is the Gospels; everything that we "know" about "him" depends on these sources.

Of the spectrum of ideas that there are about a real human Jesus, they can be lumped into two basic views: the religious Christian view and the secular historical view. The religious Christian view takes the Gospels as accurate and reliable accounts of the life of Jesus, including all of the miracles. The religious Christian view demands that Jesus Christ was a popular and well known figure in the region, who drew crowds of thousands of people and performed great miracles, who was such a revolutionary figure that the Jewish priesthood was compelled to have him arrested and put to death in dramatic fashion before hundreds or thousands of witnesses.

The secular historical view, which may also be held by some Christians, generally takes the Gospels as exaggerated accounts of the life of a real Jesus. The secular historical view basically starts with the Gospels and then removes the fantastic or "supernatural" claims in the Gospels and accepts what is left as history. The secular historical view tends to minimize the role of Jesus in the region, often stating instead that he was barely noticed by others. Secular historians who believe that Jesus existed rely on the Gospels as essentially historical, but inflated, accounts of his life.

But are the Gospels reliable historical accounts? Can we simply take the Gospels and remove the "supernatural" elements to reveal "the real Jesus" underneath? This is the approach that many secular historians and even some Christians have taken, but if the story of Jesus starts with preexisting mythology, then how can this possibly be a valid approach?

No Early Details

The earliest writings about Jesus, from Paul and others, contain no details of his life

The earliest recognized writings that we have which actually mention Jesus Christ come from someone called Paul. The only reliable information that we really have about Paul comes from the letters in his name. A book in the Bible called *Acts of the Apostles* also talks about Paul, but the reliability of *Acts* is dubious, though it does not change the general view of him that we get from his letters. The letters of Paul were written by him to various other early "Christian" communities, though the term Christian is not found in any of the works of Paul, nor indeed in any of the books of the Bible except *Acts* and *1 Peter*, both later written works. Many different letters were falsely attributed to Paul, which scholars over the past 500 years have attempted to weed out, though there is still not 100% certainty about all of the letters. Of the fourteen letters originally ascribed to Paul in the Bible, today only seven are widely accepted as authentic.

In addition to falsely attributing letters to Paul, some editing of Paul's letters took place as well, as happened with all of the works of the Bible. It is actually more difficult to detect changes that were made to the letters of Paul than it is to detect changes that were made to the Gospels because we have fewer copies of the letters of Paul. Though the letters of Paul are estimated to have been written around the middle of the 1st century, the earliest knowledge of these letters that we are aware of comes from the 2nd century, and the earliest copies of these letters that we have come from the 3rd and 4th centuries, with the oldest complete copies coming from the 4th and 5th centuries. In addition, we do know that different copies of these letters were in circulation. The Gnostic leader Marcion of the 2nd century had copies of the letters of Paul that he claimed were original and he wrote that his proto-Catholic opponents had inserted statements into their copies to make them comply with their doctrines. Likewise, the proto-Catholics charged that Marcion had deleted passages from his copies. We also know that there were at least three different copies of the letter to the Romans in circulation prior to the 4th century, a 14 chapter version, a 15 chapter version, and a 16 chapter version. A 16 chapter version is what we currently have in the Bible. There are also differences between quoted passages by early Church fathers and what we have now, as well as glaring omissions of quotes that we currently have in the works of Paul that could have been used to establish doctrinal points by early Church fathers. An excellent example of this is the passage from 1 Thessalonians 2, which states:

1 Thessalonians 2:

13 We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers. **14 For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots as they did from the**

Jews, 15 who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets,
and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone
16 by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that
they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling
up the measure of their sins; but God's wrath has
overtaken them at last.

This passage is widely accepted by scholars as a later addition to the Pauline text for the purpose of establishing a later doctrine, for several reasons. One reason is that there is no evidence that these types of strong divisions between Jews and non-Jews existed among the early Christians. Another is that this is the only statement to this effect in all of the Pauline letters and it goes against many of his other statements about unity between Jews and Gentiles. It also breaks the continuity of the chapter, and if you take it out the chapter reads just fine without it. Yet another reason is that there were no "churches" in Judea at this time. Lastly, the statement that God's wrath has overtaken the Jews makes sense referring to the destruction of Judea in 70 CE. There is no significant event that Paul could have been referring to here when he wrote around 50 CE. There is also ample motive for later Roman Church fathers to have inserted such a passage when they were trying to establish these principles as a doctrine of the Church, which they did do. What else is important about this passage is that it is one of the passages in the letters of Paul that would seem to establish a historical view of Jesus, however, as mentioned, this is regarded as a later addition. This is important to understand for people who read the letters of Paul uncritically, because some of the passages, such as this one, which seem to put Jesus in a historical context, are actually later additions.

All of this makes relying on the works of Paul to build a case or to understand the early views of Jesus difficult, but not impossible. We do know one thing, which is that any potential changes to the texts of Paul that have come down to us today are most likely changes that would have been used to establish the doctrines of Catholicism. It should also be noted that prior to their inclusion in the Bible, the letters of Paul were not considered scripture or divine, and thus modifications to them were not viewed as "changing scripture". This is certainly something to keep in mind when dealing with the works of Paul, but despite this, the letters of Paul are still critical as the earliest acknowledged writings about Jesus.

Between the works of Paul and the writing of the four canonical Gospels several other Christian works were written. Neither the works of Paul nor any of these other works give us details about the life of Jesus. Prior to the Gospels there are various works that talk about Jesus in a variety of ways, but none of them provide any details about a birth, life, ministry, or death of Jesus.

The table on the following page lists known early Christian works in the order that they are most widely believed by Biblical scholars to have been written, along with the dates that they are most widely believed to have been originally written within, the order in which they actually appear in the Bible, and who the most widely accepted authors of the books are.

Keep in mind here the order in which these books are actually presented in the Bible. (Note: This is the order in Catholic Bibles, though some others change the order of the Epistles.)

1. The Gospels
2. The Acts of the Apostles
3. The Epistles of Paul
4. The General Epistles
5. The Book of Revelation

Date Written	Order in Bible	Book Name	Description
50-60	13	1 Thessalonians	Authentic letter of Paul, written to congregation in Thessalonica, Greece
50-60	11	Philippians	Authentic letter of Paul, written to congregation in Philippi, Greece
50-60	9	Galatians	Authentic letter of Paul, written to congregation in Galatia, in modern Turkey
50-60	7	1 Corinthians	Authentic letter of Paul, written to congregation in Corinth, Greece
50-60	8	2 Corinthians	Authentic letter of Paul, written to congregation in Corinth, Greece
50-60	6	Romans	Authentic letter of Paul, written to congregation in Rome
50-60	18	Philemon	Generally accepted as authentic letter of Paul written to Philemon of Colossae
50-80	12	Colossians	Disputed letter of Paul, written to congregation in Colossae, in modern Turkey
50-95	19	Book of Hebrews	Anonymous work of a Jewish nature that refers to Christ as an apostle and high priest, once ascribed to Paul
50-120	NA	Didache	Anonymous work that is almost impossible to date. Contains sayings like those in the Gospels, but not attributed to Jesus. Has description of Eucharist rituals, but not associated with the death or body of Jesus.
50-140	NA	Gospel of Thomas	Anonymous "Gnostic" sayings gospel with statements attributed to a Jesus. No mention of Christ. Shares some sayings with the conical Gospels. There is no narrative or details of a life of Jesus.
50-140	NA	Oxyrhynchus Gospel	Scraps of a sayings gospel (possibly Gnostic), mentions Jesus approaching "in a vision"
50-200	NA	Sophia of Jesus Christ	Anonymous Gnostic story about Jesus, possibly written after the conical Gospels, but dating is difficult.

65-80	2	Gospel of Mark	Anonymous narrative story about the life of Jesus starting with his baptism
70-100	20	Epistle of James	Letter of disputed authorship. Traditionally attributed to "James the brother of Jesus", though the work itself makes no such claim.
70-120	NA	Egerton Gospel	Anonymous scrap of a narrative Gospel. One of the oldest original pieces of text about Jesus.
70-160	NA	Gospel of Peter	Anonymous passion narrative, probably a harmonization of the passion narratives of the different Gospels and written after the Gospel of John, though dating is difficult
80-100	14	2 Thessalonians	Regarded as a letter of unknown authorship that was written in Paul's name
80-100	10	Ephesians	Regarded as a letter of unknown authorship that was written in Paul's name
80-100	1	Gospel of Matthew	Anonymous narrative about Jesus based on Mark, but with the addition of the virgin birth story and other elements
80-110	21	1 Peter	Regarded as a letter of unknown authorship that was written in Peter's name
80-120	NA	Epistle of Barnabas	Letter about the sacrifice of Jesus. Refers to Jesus as "the calf" who is sacrificed for sins
80-130	3	Gospel of Luke	Was perhaps signed at one time, but original signer is unknown. The work is written in the form of a researched historical account for someone named Theophilus. Luke is based on Mark with additional elements.
80-130	5	Acts of the Apostles	Written by the same author as the Gospel of Luke, also as a history for Theophilus. The work covers the period from the resurrection of Jesus to the imprisonment of Paul.
80-140	NA	1 Clement	Letter regarding problems befalling Christian communities.
80-150	NA	Gospel of the Egyptians	Writing about "Salome", a woman in the Gospel of Mark. It states that the end of suffering will only come when all women stop giving birth, then the end of the world will come.
80-150	NA	Gospel of the Hebrews	A story that may have been originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic about "James the Just"
80-250	NA	Christian Sibyllines	Book of Gnostic prophecies about the future
90-95	27	Apocalypse of John	Letter written by an unknown John, though traditionally ascribed to "John the disciple of Jesus". The work is a metaphorical tale of coming destruction in the tradition of Jewish apocalyptic literature.

90-120	4	Gospel of John	Anonymous narrative story about Jesus, which has traditionally been ascribed to "John the disciple of Jesus". Scholars agree that this is not the case and that the author of this Gospel is also not the same as the author of Apocalypse of John or the epistles of John. Was probably written in at least two stages by two different authors.
90-120	23	1 John	Letter by someone named John warning against deceivers who say that Jesus was not real
90-120	24	2 John	Letter by someone named John warning against deceivers who say that Jesus was not real
90-120	25	3 John	Letter by someone named John emphasizing that their witness is true
90-120	26	Epistle of Jude	Letter which claims to have been written by a Jude, brother of James, but is generally considered by scholars to be of unknown authorship. The letter is a polemic against "godless men" who don't believe in Jesus, and it also begins to outline the concept of the trinity.
100-150	15	1 Timothy	Regarded as a letter of unknown authorship that was written in Paul's name, which seeks to support elements of Catholic doctrine
100-150	16	2 Timothy	Regarded as a letter of unknown authorship that was written in Paul's name, which seeks to support elements of Catholic doctrine
100-150	17	Titus	Regarded as a letter of unknown authorship that was written in Paul's name, which seeks to support elements of Catholic doctrine
100-150	NA	Apocalypse of Peter	A work attributed to Peter by Clement, though only fragments remain. Talks about the coming end of the world.
100-150	NA	Secret Book of James	A letter claimed to have been written by James which talks about Jesus and salvation
100-160	NA	Gospel of the Ebionites	A work that attempted to harmonize the Gospels of Matthew and Luke
100-160	NA	Gospel of the Nazoreans	A work that quotes many passages from Matthew, but it also has several variants that are different from the current Matthew
100-160	22	2 Peter	A letter written under the name of Simon Peter, but regarded by scholars as of unknown authorship. The letter is a polemic against false prophets and seeks to downplay expectations for the end of the world, addressing questions that were rising about why the world had not yet ended "as Jesus had promised".

What we will discuss here are the books that were written prior to the writing of the Gospel of Mark or shortly after, when many people had still not been exposed to the Gospels.

Paul discussed several topics in his letters. Paul talked about the persecution of those people who believed in Jesus Christ, he talked about how to be "in Christ" by loving one another, he talked about becoming members of the body of Christ, he discussed issues of circumcision and other practices that were different between Jews and "Gentiles", he discussed the hope for the coming of Christ to establish a new kingdom, and he discussed a crucifixion of Christ.

What he did not discuss, however, are any details of the life of Jesus, who killed Jesus, any details of his death beyond the claim that he was crucified (not even indicating where or when), the teachings of Jesus, the miracles of Jesus or any events that are mentioned in the Gospels other than the crucifixion, and he did not mention anything about an empty tomb, a virgin birth, the names of his parents, or where he was supposedly from.

It's not just that Paul didn't have details about the life of Jesus, many of the books in the New Testament contain no hint of information about a historical Jesus. Indeed it is really only the Gospels and a few of the later written books, such as 1 & 2 Timothy and 2 Peter, etc., that clearly describe a historical figure. Everything that comes before the Gospels, and even some books that many scholars place shortly after the first Gospels, don't talk about the Jesus of the Gospels at all, they just mention the name "Jesus Christ", with no historical details, no context, no teachings, nothing that really relates back to the Gospels, aside from the name, "Jesus Christ". This is the case for the Pauline letters, the *Book of Hebrews*, the *Epistle of James*, *1 Peter*, 1, 2, & 3 John, and *Apocalypse of John* (Revelation).

When these sources do mention things that seem to relate to the Gospel stories, they invariably contradict the Gospels. For example, *1 Peter* discusses the death of Christ, but does so in a way that is incompatible with the Gospels.

1 Peter 3:

18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring us to God. He was put to death in the flesh, **but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, 20 who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight people, were saved through water. 21 And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.**

Here 1 Peter, probably written around the end of the 1st century, does assert that Jesus was put to death "*in the flesh*" (obviously making a specific doctrinal point) but then says that he was raised "*in the spirit*".

The Gospels take a very strong position in making it clear that Jesus' resurrection was "in the flesh", *not* "in the spirit". After his resurrection Jesus is depicted as walking around, touching people, having dinner, etc. in the Gospels, which supports a major doctrine for Christians: They are to expect to be *bodily* resurrected. This passage flies in the face of such a doctrine and clearly contradicts the Gospel accounts. It would be inconceivable that someone would teach that Jesus were "*made alive in the spirit*" if he had actually been witnessed to have come back to life "*in the flesh*". Examples like this abound in the early epistles.

Notice also that 1 Peter 3 refers to Jesus freeing the trapped souls from before the flood, something that was also mentioned in *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*.

Paul's Jesus

Many statements in the letters of Paul only make sense if Paul does not view Jesus Christ as a historical person

In the middle of an era of apocalyptic literature and beliefs, as we have already discussed, Paul was an apocalyptic preacher. Paul's "Jesus" was his "Enoch" or his "Isaiah". Paul defiantly thought of Jesus as real, the question is what did "real" mean to Paul?

The bigger point is that what Paul described and believed-in was no different from the other apocalyptic stories of his time, whether they are set on earth or in heaven, as Paul's claims themselves seem to be set in both realms or are made in such vague ways that the distinction becomes almost meaningless or was left up to the believer. Even if aspects of Paul's ideas are earthy, they are not historical, i.e. they are not set in real history, they are just set in an abstract earthly realm.

But Paul was not a Jew who was taking part in a traditional Jewish religion, Paul was a Hellenistic Jew who participated in both Jewish and non-Jewish culture, practices, and ideas. Indeed Paul was, in his own words, the "apostle to the Gentiles," and Paul's ministry took place in Greece and what is now Turkey.



As such, Paul was a man of two cultures, as were early Christians in general.

By the 1st century there were an abundance of religions in the Greco-Roman world known as "mystery religions". There were hundreds of these different mystery religions, which were like cults that worshiped specific heroes or gods, such as Adonis, Dionysus, Mithras, and Osiris. Many of these gods were savior type gods, who were said to take on various problems of individuals or the world, and people were initiated into these religions often through secret ceremonies that included various rituals, such as sacrifices, special meals, anointing, washings, etc.

We don't know a whole lot about these mystery religions, both because most of them did not have written doctrines and their views were kept somewhat secret, and also because what little original information there was about them was not preserved or was destroyed by Christians once they came to power. But, we do know a little bit about them from some comments made about them by early Christians. Both Justin Martyr and Tertullian made comments that compare the Christian rites to the "mysteries" of other religions.

And this food is called among us Eucharistia, of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is so living as Christ has enjoined. For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh. For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them; that Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, said, "This do ye in remembrance of Me, this is My body"; and that, after the same manner, having taken the cup and given thanks, He said, "This is My blood"; and gave it to them alone. **Which the wicked devils have imitated in the mysteries of Mithras, commanding the same thing to be done. For, that bread and a cup of water are placed with certain incantations in the mystic rites of one who is being initiated, you either know or can learn.**

- *First Apology*; Justin Martyr, 150 CE

Here Justin Martyr states that "wicked devils" have "imitated" these mysteries in the Mithric religions because these rituals existed before the Christian religion, so the claim was that Satan had "imitated" these mysteries in advance of Jesus. Hopefully you can see the problem with this logic, but, at any rate, it does tell us that the rituals of Christianity

are similar to the rituals of Mithraism.

Tertullian also commented on this subject:

Chapter XL.-No Difference in the Spirit of Idolatry and of Heresy. In the Rites of Idolatry, Satan Imitated and Distorted the Divine Institutions of the Older Scriptures. The Christian Scriptures Corrupted by Him in the Perversions of the Various Heretics.

The question will arise, By whom is to be interpreted the sense of the passages which make for heresies? By the devil, of course, to whom pertain those wiles which pervert the truth, and who, by the mystic rites of his idols, vies even with the essential portions of the sacraments of God. **He, too, baptizes some that is, his own believers and faithful followers; he promises the putting away of sins by a layer (of his own); and if my memory still serves me, Mithra there, (in the kingdom of Satan) sets his marks on the foreheads of his soldiers; celebrates also the oblation of bread, and introduces an image of a resurrection,** and before a sword wreathes a crown. What also must we say to (Satan's) limiting his chief priest to a single marriage? He, too, has his virgins; he, too, has his proficientes in continence. Suppose now we revolve in our minds the superstitions of Numa Pompilius [legendary king of Rome, 8th-7th century BCE], and consider his priestly offices and badges and privileges, his sacrificial services, too, and the instruments and vessels of the sacrifices themselves, and the curious rites of his expiations and vows: is it not clear to us that the devil imitated the well-known moroseness of the Jewish law? Since, therefore he has sown such emulation in his great aim of expressing, in the concerns of his idolatry, those very things of which consists the administration of Christ's sacraments, it follows, of course, that the same being, possessing still the same genius, both set his heart upon, and succeeded in, adapting to his profane and rival creed the very documents of divine things and of the Christian saints.

- *The Prescription Against Heretics*; Tertullian

He made the argument again in another work:

"Well, but the nations, who are strangers to all understanding of spiritual powers, ascribe to their idols the imbuing of waters with the self-same efficacy." (So they do) but they cheat themselves with waters which are widowed. **For washing is the channel through which they are initiated into some sacred rites of some notorious Isis or**

Mithras. The gods themselves likewise they honor by washings. Moreover, by carrying water around, and sprinkling it, they everywhere expiate country-seats, houses, temples, and whole cities: at all events, at the Apollinarian and Eleusinian games they are baptized; and they presume that the effect of their doing that is their regeneration and the remission of the penalties due to their perjuries. Among the ancients, again, whoever had defiled himself with murder, was wont to go in quest of purifying waters. Therefore, if the mere nature of water, in that it is the appropriate material for washing away, leads men to flatter themselves with a belief in omens of purification, how much more truly will waters render that service through the authority of God, by whom all their nature has been constituted! If men think that water is endowed with a medicinal virtue by religion, what religion is more effectual than that of the living God? Which fact being acknowledged, we recognize here also the zeal of the devil rivaling the things of God, while we find him, too, practicing baptism in his subjects.

- *On Baptism*; Tertullian

So we know from this that many of the practices, such as baptism and sacred meals, that were a part of the teachings of Paul were already in use among the mystery religions in the Greco-Roman world. We also see that the mysteries of Mithras *"introduces an image of a resurrection"*. This is important to understand when reading the works of Paul.

Paul's preaching and ideas reflect a merger of the Jewish apocalyptic and messianic traditions with the Greek mystery religions.

Let's look at the writings of Paul to get an understanding of this.

Romans 11:

5 So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers, **I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written:**

'Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.'

27'And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins.'

28 As regards the gospel they are enemies for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; 29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Here Paul seems to be talking about the coming of a *future* "Deliverer", but he makes no

mention at all of Jesus here. If Jesus had just been here then why is Paul talking about old scriptures instead of Jesus Christ, who had just been here?

This is similar to something that is also said in Philippians.

Philippians 3:

12 Not that I have already obtained this or have already been made perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 **I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.** 15 Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. 16 Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

17 Brothers, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. 18 For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. 19 Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. 20 **But our commonwealth is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.** 21 He will transform our humble bodies so that it may be conformed to his glorious body, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

Here Paul says that they are *expecting* a Savior from *heaven*, which is Jesus. He doesn't say that they are expecting him to come back again or anything like that, but that they are expecting a Savior from heaven for the first time.

Back to Romans and the talk of mysteries:

Romans 16:

25 Now to the one who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, **according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages 26 but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles,** according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory for ever! Amen.

This sounds like a very odd thing to say if one is talking about a Jesus Christ that had just recently been on earth and proclaimed his message from his own mouth, witnessed by thousands of people. Paul is saying that ancient mysteries are being revealed and made known through prophetic writings, but why wouldn't he be saying that these things were

made known by Jesus himself?

Romans 10, from prior to this passage, also highlights this problem.

Romans 10:

1 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them [the Israelites] is that they may be saved. 2 I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. 3 For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness. 4 For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

...

12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. 13 For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

14 But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? **And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?** 15 And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' 16 But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message?' 17 **So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word about Christ.**

Romans 10 is a very significant passage. If Jesus had just been on earth and been ministering to the Jews and performing miracles in Galilee and Judea and drawing large crowds, as the Gospels claim, then why does Paul ask here if Jews cannot be blamed for not believing in Christ because they haven't heard about him? Paul then says that faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard is the word "*about Christ*" (Some translations also read "*of God*"). All of these things don't make sense if Jesus had just been here on earth proclaiming his own message and demonstrating his own miracles. This passage is followed by a passage where Paul asks again "*have they not heard,*" to which he rhetorically replies, "*indeed they have,*" followed by a passage from the Old Testament that says, "*Their voice has gone out to all the earth,*" meaning the message of Christ through the messengers. Nowhere in this address, where it would make perfect sense to state that Jesus had made himself known to the Israelites, does Paul say anything about Jesus, he just quotes old scriptures and talks about messengers of Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:

1 When I came to you, brothers, **I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ,**

and him crucified. 3 And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. 4 My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

Here Paul is calling Jesus Christ, "*and him crucified,*" a mystery of God.

1 Corinthians 15:

50 What I am saying, brothers, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 **Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.** For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 54 When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:

'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'

55 'Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?'

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

Here Paul claims that he is telling these people a "mystery", but why would this be a mystery if Jesus Christ had just been on earth a few years earlier to bring this very message to people, a message that he supposedly proclaimed several times according to the Gospels, and which he demonstrated by raising Lazarus, and then himself, from the dead? Beyond that, why would Paul then refer to scripture as support for eternal life instead of referring to Jesus himself?

Ephesians 3:

1 This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— 2 for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 and how **the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, 4 a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. 5 In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: 6** that is, the Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

There is uncertainty as to whether or not Ephesians is an authentic letter from Paul, but regardless, how could a statement such as this be made if Jesus Christ had just been here on earth? This states that the mystery of Christ has, *"been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit."* It would not be said that this mystery was revealed to his apostles by the Spirit if Jesus had just recently been on earth.

Colossians 1:

24 I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and **in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.** 25 I became its servant according to **God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,** 26 **the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints.** 27 **To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.** 28 It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Colossians is another work that may not be an authentic letter of Paul, but here we are told that the *"body of Christ"* is *"the church"*. We are told that God has chosen Paul to make his "mystery" known, which is *"Christ in you"*. The church is also called the body of Christ in Ephesians as well.

Ephesians 4:

7 But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 **Therefore it is said,**

'When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.'

9 (When it says, 'He ascended', what does it mean but that he had also descended first into the depths of the earth? 10 He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) 11 The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 **to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,** 13 **until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.** 14 We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. 15 **But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,** 16 **from whom**

the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Here we see several things. For one thing this passage quotes the Old Testament scriptures (Psalm 68:18) in order to describe Christ, something quite odd if Jesus had just been here. In interpreting the scriptures that talk about ascension it says that he had to have descended first, but where did he descend to? "*The depths of the earth*," in other words Hades, the underworld, what we now call Hell. This is all metaphorical and mythical talk based on scriptures and related to the apocalyptic ideas found in stories such as *The Book of Enoch*, but why go into this if Jesus had just been incarnated "in the flesh" on earth, walking around some 15-20 years ago? If Jesus were just on earth walking and talking to people, why talk about descending into the underworld here? It's not just that this talks about Christ descending into the underworld, but nowhere in the letter does it ever say anything about an earthly ministry of Jesus. If this were something that were said in addition to a discussion of his earthly activities and his teachings that would be one thing, but all of these letters just quote from scripture and talk about Jesus in metaphorical ways like this.

The passage goes on to talk about *the community* as the "*body of Christ*". Paul described the community or the church as the body of Christ in almost all of his letters.

All of this mystery talk (and there is more of it in the various epistles of the New Testament) is not only similar to what we believe was preached in the other mystery religions, but much of it also precludes a prior earthly ministry of Jesus.

Paul specifically tells us that his knowledge of Jesus Christ has not come from any human, but has come to him directly by "revelation" from Jesus Christ himself.

Galatians 1:

11 I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. 12 I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

If Jesus Christ had just been on earth some 15 to 25 years prior to the writing of this letter by Paul (presumably to present his message), then why is it that the first person to write about the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ is someone who never witnessed his existence and who neither received his message from him while he was on earth, nor received it from any of his supposed followers? Furthermore, if Jesus had just been here then why would Paul be so adamant about saying that he received his gospel from revelation? If Jesus were just here then the gospel from the mouth of Jesus should have been seen as the most legitimate and authoritative, yet Paul presents his message as more authoritative because it hasn't come from anyone else. How could Paul's message from "revelation" compete with Peter's message straight from the mouth of Jesus?

Of course, the whole idea that Jesus had come to earth and spread his message is not

presented until the Gospels are written, some 10 to 60 years after the evangelism of Paul.

Critically, Paul also never used the term "disciple", he referred to Peter and others as "apostles". This is actually very important.

Disciples are students, who we can expect would have been in personal contact with their teacher. Apostles, on the other hand, are missionaries.

In all of his discussions of the apostles Paul gives no indication that these people have literally walked hand-in-hand with Jesus and seen his miracles first hand. Paul treats these people as just another group of evangelicals like himself. It is only with the Gospels that Peter and the others are called "disciples", meaning people who were literally taught by Jesus - Paul never identified them as such.

Paul's letters contain many discussions of mysteries and revelations, but also visions as well. So what are these visions about? Was Paul talking about things that he and others literally saw, or are the visions that Paul talked about the same types of visions that were employed in the apocalyptic literature of his own time?

2 Corinthians 12:

1 I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, **I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord.** 2 **I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows.** 3 **And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—** 4 **was caught up to paradise.**

He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.

"A man" in this case is Paul. Paul is making a claim about his own ascension to heaven some 14 years prior, which, if this letter was written around 52 CE as it is traditionally dated, means that he would be claiming that this happened around 38 CE. But did Paul really have these visions, or is he just making these claims up as part of an apocalyptic tradition to claim apostolic authority? Either Paul really had visions and out of body experiences or he exaggerated or he presented these claims as theological devices. Regardless, this story, whether based on real visions or fabricated ones, is set in the realm multi-leveled heavens.

The issue of how Paul uses "visions" is important however. We absolutely know that during this time and place people used claims of visions as a means to tell stories, as a means to lend weight to what they were saying, as a means to claim authority, etc., but do we believe that when Zephaniah and others tell us of their visions that they *really* had literal visions, or do we understand this as a theological and literary device?

The *Harper Collins NRSV Study Bible* has the following note about 2 Corinthians 12.2:

12.2 *Person*, Paul himself, who in vv. 2-4 is describing one ecstatic experience. *Third heaven*, i.e., where

Paradise is located. Heavenly journeys were a popular means of claiming divine authentication and were apparently used by Paul's opponents for this purpose.

So what exactly is Paul doing when he talks about "visions"? Is Paul talking about real hallucinations, is he talking about real dreams, is he talking about real things that he and others imagined, or are all of the visions that Paul talked about, applied to himself and others, just theological and literary devices used to establish authority? The same question can of course be asked of *The Apocalypse of John*, a.k.a. Revelation.

Revelation 1:

1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 **who testifies to everything he saw**—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

4 John,

To the seven churches in the province of Asia:

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

7 Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.

8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 **On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, 11 which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches:** to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

12 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. 14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. 15 His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. 18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

The Apocalypse of John of course builds on themes in *The Book of Daniel* and *The Book of Enoch*, as well as others. Are we to believe that these visions were literal visions? He really hallucinated all of these things, saw them before his very eyes? Very few scholars will support this position. Almost all scholars, aside from fundamentalists basically, agree that this John didn't literally "see" an angel or literally "see" any of the things that he talks about here, but rather he used the claim of visions in the same tradition of other similar works, as a theological and literary device.

Why then, if it is easy for scholars to agree that the "visions" described in *The Book of Daniel*, *The Book of Enoch*, *Revelation*, and dozens of other apocalyptic writings of the time, were nothing more than theological devices, do people insist on viewing Paul's "visions" as anything other than these exact same types of devices? *The Apocalypse of John*, like the letters of Paul, is also a letter of correspondence.

Galatians 1:

14 I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. 15 **But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man,** 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.

Paul is again talking divine revelations here, presumably being called to Jesus when he was young, as this passage would indicate. I must note here that the story about Paul being converted by a vision on the road to Damascus comes from *Acts of the Apostles*, written by the author of Luke, probably in the early 2nd century, and there is nothing in any of Paul's letter to support this story. It is also notable that Paul says God's Son was revealed "in" him. Though many translations change the "in" to "to", the Greek says "in".

Below we see Paul's account of the coming of Jesus at the end of the world.

1 Thessalonians 4:

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 **For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.** 15 For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 **For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first.** 17 **Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air;** and so we will be with the Lord for ever.

Not only is it more than apparent through all of Paul's writings that Jesus and God are two totally separate entities as we see here, i.e. that Jesus is *not* God, but here we see Paul describing a literal descent from a literal heaven above the clouds. All of this relates directly to the concepts in the other apocalyptic literature. In *The Book of Enoch*, for example, "the Son of man" is not God, God is separate from the savior, and that is also how Paul described Jesus. Paul, like the others of his time and place, described heaven as a real literal place above the clouds, with the coming of the savior described in the same way as it is described in earlier apocalyptic literature.

Galatians 3:

18 For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

19 What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. **The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator.** 20 A mediator, however, does not represent just one party; but God is one.

21 Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. 22 But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, **so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.**

23 **Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.** 24 **So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might**

be justified by faith. 25 Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 **If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.**

We note here that Paul is again talking about real angels as having played a real role in human history, and also that Paul says "faith" has come, not Jesus, and that "you", the people who have faith in Christ, then became the promised seed.

1 Corinthians 4:

9 For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. **We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men.** 10 We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored!

1 Corinthians 6:

1 If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? 2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? 3 **Do you not know that we will judge angels?** How much more the things of this life! 4 Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! 5 I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? 6 But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers!

1 Corinthians 12:

6 If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. 7 A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. 8 For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; 9 neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. 10 **For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.**

The importance of these passages is in establishing Paul's worldview. Here he says that

women ought to cover their heads, "*because of the angels.*" This refers to the types of ideas about angels that we find in *The Book of Enoch*, where angels are described as coming down and consorting with women. Paul imagines that after the coming of Christ people will sit in judgment of angels, presumably of the lower heavens. Paul certainly was immersed in the types of beliefs that we find in the apocalyptic stories of his time.

In Romans 8 we are told again of rulers and powers similar to those in other apocalyptic writings:

Romans 8:

31 What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? 33 **Who will bring any charge against God's elect?** It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written,

'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.'

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 **For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,** 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Here Paul lists out the potential things which might try to separate followers from Christ, and he lists out angels, rulers, and powers. This passage comes from the NRSV, but the NIV lists "*neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers*", with a footnote on the word demons reading "*Or heavenly rulers*". The "*powers*" here are agreed by everyone to be "heavenly" beings.

In 2 Corinthians 6 Paul refers to Beliar, the evil heavenly power also referred to in *The Martyrdom of Isaiah* and other Jewish mythology.

2 Corinthians 6:

14 Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? 15 **What agreement does Christ have with Beliar?** Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God;

2 Thessalonians, which may not have been an authentic letter of Paul, gives us another look at Jesus and his angels:

2 Thessalonians 1:

5 All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. 6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. **This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.** 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

Once again we are immersed in the world of apocalyptic stories, with claims similar to those found in *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*.

Having seen that Paul's beliefs and writings relate very much to apocalyptic and messianic stories, as well as to the practices of mystery religions, let us take a look at Paul's statements on the crucifixion of Jesus. The works in which Paul talks about a crucifixion of Jesus are Galatians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, and Romans. Let's start with Galatians:

Galatians 2:

15 "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' 16 know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

17 "If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! 18 If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. 19 For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. 20 **I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.** The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

This mentions crucifixion, but it is obviously very metaphorical in nature and can

certainly not be said to be evidence that Paul was talking about a historical crucifixion event. Galatians 3 goes on to say:

Galatians 3:

1 You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? **Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.** 2 I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, **or by believing what you heard?** 3 Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? 4 Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? 5 Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

This paragraph is a little confusing. At one moment it looks like Paul is clearly saying that these are witnesses to the crucifixion of Jesus, but then you see that he says "portrayed" as crucified. The whole issue is settled, however, when we take into account where the Galatians are, which is in Galatia, in what is now Turkey.



Obviously these people couldn't have been potential witnesses to a spur of the moment crucifixion that took place in Jerusalem. This makes Paul's comments on Jesus Christ being "portrayed" as crucified even more puzzling. Paul is probably talking about something similar to what Tertullian described regarding the use of images in Mithraic rituals. This certainly indicates that Paul viewed the crucifixion of Christ somehow differently than our understanding of the crucifixion as the event portrayed in the Gospels. Paul also admonished the Galatians to "*believe what you hear,*" obviously not something that you have to tell people who are personal witnesses to an event.

Paul goes on to discuss crucifixion a bit more. In Galatians 5 we read:

Galatians 5:

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 **Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.** 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Here again we see Paul talking about crucifixion in some metaphorical sense, and, as usual, Paul makes no references to any words or teachings of Jesus, he just offers his own pieces of advice and refers to "Christ Jesus" in an abstract and metaphorical sense.

In Galatians 6 Paul mentions crucifixion one last time in the work, where he states:

Galatians 6:

13 Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. 14 **May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.** 15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. 16 Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.

Again we get metaphor from Paul, and no indication of knowledge of a literal, historical, crucifixion of Jesus.

We can now move on to the book of Romans, where Paul mentions the crucifixion of Jesus one time in Romans 6:

Romans 6:

1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also

live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

This passage certainly seems a little more concrete than the ones from Galatians, and perhaps it does imply an earthly crucifixion, but still no historical information is provided and there is still a good bit of metaphor in use. There is also good reason to believe that this is talking about a spiritual burial and raising of the dead, which we will discuss. Let's go ahead and first look at the discussions of the crucifixion in 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 1:

20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22 **Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.** 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

Here we have more metaphorical talk and nothing of any detail. It is also peculiar to claim that "*Jews demand miraculous signs ... but we preach Christ crucified.*" According to the Gospels Jesus had just been among the Jews not too long ago presenting them with miraculous signs, and the Jews had just personally crucified Jesus, so this message of Paul seems a bit confusing if one assumes that the Gospel accounts are historical. Let's skip ahead now to 2 Corinthians 13, and we will return to another passage from 1 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 13:

2 I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, 3 since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. 4 **For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power.** Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you.

5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?

This again is another passage that is heavy on metaphor and light on substance. There isn't anything in this passage that compels us to believe that Paul is talking about a real

crucifixion that took place on earth. There is one more passage that discusses the crucifixion of Jesus, however, and that comes from 1 Corinthians 2:

1 Corinthians 2:

6 We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8 **None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.** 9

However, as it is written:

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" – 10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him?

This is the passage that is pointed to by those who claim that Paul did consider Jesus in a recent historical context and that he described him as a person who had recently been on earth and been executed, but there is more to this passage than first meets the eye, and secondly, this passage still gives us no details about Jesus' crucifixion. For example it does not mention Pilate, the Romans, or even the Jews, just "the rulers". And who are these rulers? Are they the heavenly rulers and powers like those described in Romans 8 and various apocalyptic stories? The word in Greek that was originally used here is "*archons*", which simply means "powers", "authorities", "rulers", "princes", etc., but based on the context it can either imply "earthly rulers" or "heavenly rulers". Indeed, *archons* is used elsewhere in the Pauline letters to mean heavenly rulers. We also know that the word was used in the "Old Testament" to mean both earthly and heavenly rulers. *Kittel's Unabridged Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, an authoritative resource on the meanings of words used in the New Testament, notes that *archons* is used in the Greek version of the Hebrew scriptures, the Septuagint, in relation to celestial powers whom the Messiah and his followers are in conflict with. Certainly this is the best fit for Paul's usage of the word.

ἄρχων. [archon]:

In the LXX [Septuagint], too, the ἄρχων is one who exercises authoritative influence; the term is used for the national, local or tribal leader from Gn. to 2 Ch. In the historical books it is used for a general, though sometimes we also read of the ἄρχοντες τῶν ἰσραῶν (Neh. 12:7). In the later books it more often denotes officials of the overlord of Palestine (ἄρχων τοῦ βασιλῆως, Da. 2:15). **In Da. 10:13, 20f. cf. 12:1 (also Da. LXX: 10:13) it denotes the celestial beings which guard and represent earthly states (popularly identified with the corresponding peoples), and on the rank and power (→ ἀρχή) of which**

in the spirit world the position of these states depends. The ἄρχων of Israel has the name of Michael. His victory (or that of the One like a man) over the ἄρχοντες of the Persians and Greeks leads to the dominion of the Jews over these peoples.

2 To a large extent the ἄρχοντες are opponents of the people of God who are resisted by the One like a man (later the Messiah) and His allies, and who will be defeated in the last days. In its conflict with earthly enemies the people of God is really engaged with these celestial powers. The same concept is found in Pesikt. Kah., 23 (150b–151a): **שרי אמות העולם** ἄρχοντες ἐθνῶν τοῦ κόσμου, of Babylon, Greece etc. Cf. also M. Ex., 1 (36b, 6 f., Friedm.): **In the future world God will call the princes (שריהם) of the kingdoms to account before He calls the kingdoms themselves.**

- Kittel's *Unabridged Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*

Critically, we also know that several early Christians interpreted this passage from Paul as meaning "heavenly rulers", not earthly rulers. The significant Christian apologist Origen, writing in the 2nd century, clearly understood the rulers, or princes, that Paul was talking about as being heavenly rulers. Origen discussed this passage from Paul in his work *De Principiis*, where he stated:

Accordingly, in the holy Scriptures we find that there are princes over individual nations; as in Daniel we read that there was a prince of the kingdom of Persia, and another prince of the kingdom of Græcia, **who are clearly shown, by the nature of the passage, to be not human beings, but certain powers.** In the prophecies of Ezekiel, also, **the prince of Tyre is unmistakably shown to be a kind of spiritual power. When these, then, and others of the same kind, possessing each his own wisdom, and building up his own opinions and sentiments, beheld our Lord and Savior professing and declaring that He had for this purpose come into the world, that all the opinions of science, falsely so called, might be destroyed, not knowing what was concealed within Him, they forthwith laid a snare for Him:** for "the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers assembled together, against the Lord and His Christ." But their snares being discovered, and the plans which they had attempted to carry out being made manifest when they crucified the Lord of glory, **therefore the apostle says, "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect, but not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, who are brought to naught, which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."**

- Origen; *De Principiis*

Here Origen clearly argues in the 2nd century that the "*archons* of this world" are "*not human beings*," but are instead a "*kind of spiritual power*."

But, we can also look at other passages in the Pauline corpus to see how these terms are used in other situations. The usage in Romans 8 has already been noted, but rulers and powers are discussed elsewhere as well.

Ephesians 3:

7 Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power. 8 Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages by God who created all things; 10 **so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.** 11 This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

It must be noted that the word for rulers that we have in the earliest texts in this instance is not *archons* but another Greek word for ruler, though this is not necessarily significant. A more problematic issue, however, is that there is uncertainty as to whether Ephesians is an authentic letter of Paul or a later pseudo-Pauline letter. Regardless, it is in the Bible and attributed to Paul and it is still representative of early Christian views about Jesus. There is another passage in Ephesians as well, however, where *archon* is used, and this passage makes a heavenly view of the rulers and Jesus quite clear.

Ephesians 2:

1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live **when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler [archon] of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.** 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 **And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,** 7 in order that in the coming ages he might **show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.** 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that

no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

This passage from Ephesians, perhaps, makes the passage from Romans 6 more clear. Here we clearly see a heavenly and spiritual "death" and "resurrection" of "Christ Jesus". We also see here the term *archon* used to clearly describe a ruler "*of the kingdom of the air.*" Earl Doherty states that many New Testament scholars, including S. G. F. Brandon, C. K. Barrett, Jean Hering, Paula Fredriksen, S. D. F. Salmond, all interpret Paul's passage in 1 Corinthians 2 as referring to spiritual *archons*, not earthly ones. These are all considered reputable New Testament scholars, who are Christians themselves and whose works are accepted by Christians. This reading of 1 Corinthians 2 is all the more understandable when one puts Paul's view of Jesus in the context of other early apocalyptic Jewish literature.

Having seen Paul's discussions of crucifixion and seen that he wrote very much in the spirit of the other apocalyptic writers of his time and before, let us now tackle some of the passages which some people believe show that Paul viewed Jesus as a historical person.

The first comes from 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul states that he and others have "seen" the resurrected Jesus.

1 Corinthians 15:

3 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: **that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, 4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me. 9** For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. 11 Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

This is a highly cherished passage in the writings of Paul, precisely because of its rarity. This is one of the very few passages that seems to tie Jesus into history and solidly into the Gospel tradition, leading Christians to view it as evidence of a continuous line of knowledge of the resurrection, but there are several problems with this view.

Firstly I will say that the authenticity of this passage is debated, though I will not state that it is inauthentic and move on. Nevertheless, Robert M. Price has put forward a case for interpolation in [Apocryphal Apparitions: 1 Corinthians 15:3-11 as a Post-Pauline Interpolation](#). One of the most compelling pieces of information supporting the claim that

this passage is a later interpolation is that this is the only place in all of the Pauline letters where "the Twelve" is used.

Having said that, however, assuming that the passage is authentic it still does not establish a historical view of Jesus, and I would argue that the passage actually undermines a "secular historical" view of Jesus, i.e. a view of Jesus as a mortal person.

Firstly, the passage says that Jesus died, was buried, and raised, "*in accordance with the scriptures.*" The scriptures that are talked about here of course have nothing to do with the New Testament, those scriptures had not yet been written (unless this is a poor post-Gospel interpolation). What is being talked about here are old scriptures, and thus these events are being relayed on a scriptural basis: "These things happened because the scriptures say so."

The claimed appearances here are, once again, devices used to establish authority and authenticity. We know that Paul never saw a physical Jesus, yet here within this account of appearances we have Paul, whom Jesus appeared to just as he appeared to all the others. There is some confusion around the phrase "*as to someone untimely born,*" but this is a means of Paul calling himself the least of the apostles, and it was a term used to describe a hideous person, relating more to birth defects, etc. It could perhaps also be read as "Last of all, as to a poor wretch, he appeared also to me." Paul often referred to himself in a self-demeaning manner.

We know that "Jesus' appearance" to Paul can't be describing a materially real event, yet Paul's vision, while last, is still of the same nature as all the others.

This is where we get into differences between arguments that are addressed to different notions of Jesus. If one takes the position that Jesus is the "Son of God", then the visions can be explained as literal events that these people really witnessed. All of these people, and somehow even Paul, "saw" the resurrected Jesus. To this we have to ask why the emphasis was put on the scriptures, why the "500 brothers" are not a part of later traditions, and how it is that Paul was a witness to this when as a literal event it contradicts his other statements about the nature of his knowledge of Jesus?

If one takes the position that Jesus was not really the "Son of God", but was just a mortal person around whom legends developed, then this passage is even more problematic. If Jesus existed but didn't *really* rise from the dead, then how is this passage explained? If Paul and these others are talking about a real person, then why do we have stories about Jesus appearing to so many people so early in the tradition? What are these claims of Paul's if Jesus didn't really rise from the dead, just lies or misconceptions?

Again the "Jesus as myth" position gives a cleaner explanation of the passage, in which the nature of Jesus and the character of all of Jesus' "appearances" are consistent, both among each other and among different events, such as Paul's trip "*up to the third heaven.*" Paul's trip to heaven, the revelations of Jesus to Paul, the visions of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection (both to Paul and others), and the visions of others such as John, are all cut from the same cloth - they are all the exact same type of apocalyptic

devices that are employed in stories such as *The Book of Enoch* and *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, etc.

The thing about the apocalyptic writings is that they represented a type of truth as far as the writers were concerned. They weren't "lies" per se, it was just a means of telling a "spiritually true" story, and that's all that Paul was doing in his letters as well. One of the problems with the idea that the story of Jesus Christ started with a man is explaining how you get from a mortal man who didn't really perform any miracles or rise from the dead to the writings of Paul a short time later in which there is little trace of a mortal Jesus, instead only a transcendent being whose attributes are divine and the firm conviction with which Paul and others held to those divine attributes.

I would argue that the writers of the pre-Christian apocalypses believed in the truth and reality of their stories just as much as Paul and other early Christians believed in theirs. There is no doubt that Paul believed very strongly in "Jesus Christ" and viewed Jesus as very real, but Paul also believed very strongly in the existence of angels, whom he also considered real, and a three level heaven above the clouds, and he spoke about these things with just as much fervor and conviction and "knowledge" as he did about Jesus. Why would we make a distinction between the angels that Paul talked about and Jesus? This would be like making a distinction between the angels in *The Book of Enoch* and Enoch himself, claiming that Enoch was literally real, but the angels were just symbolic or figurative.

We do also see in *The Book of Enoch* an example of a heavenly "death" and transformation, leading up to the revelation of the Son of man.

13 Then I fell upon my face, while all my flesh was dissolved, and my spirit became changed.

14 I cried out with a loud voice, with a powerful spirit, blessing, glorifying, and exalting.

15 And those blessings, which proceeded from my mouth, became acceptable in the presence of the Ancient of days.

16 The Ancient of days came with Michael and Gabriel, Raphael and Phanuel, with thousands of thousands, and myriads and myriads, which would not be numbered.

17 Then that angel came to me, and with his voice saluted me, saying, You are the Son of man, who art born for righteousness, and righteousness has rested upon you.

- *The Book of Enoch*, Chapter 70

The Jesus of Paul and pre-Gospel Christians is part of a cast of characters, and that cast of characters only includes God and the angels and other heavenly beings. Nothing from Paul or other early epistle writers sets Jesus among a cast of people, that only happens in the Gospels and later writings, where the *apostles* mentioned by Paul are turned into *disciples* of Jesus himself. The Jesus of Paul is an eternal heavenly being, who has always existed, and if he ever did come down to earth in Paul's mind he never put him in any earthly setting or related him to any other people or places.

1 Corinthians 10:

1 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. 2 **They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.** 3 **They all ate the same spiritual food** 4 **and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.** 5 Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.

...

1 Corinthians 15:

42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 45 So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. 46 The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. 47 **The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven.** 48 **As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.** 49 **And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.** 50 I declare to you, brothers, that **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God**, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Here Paul says that Christ was with the Israelites as they fled from Egypt, and he states that the first Adam was from the earth and the last Adam, Christ, is from heaven. He is a man, but a man from heaven.

But there are still objections to all of this, still passages that are presumed to present trouble for this reading.

Chief among the passages of Paul that are believed to establish Paul's view of Jesus as a historical person is the passage that refers to James as "the Lord's brother" or "brother of the Lord" in Galatians. This is such an important and complicated issue, however, that I will address this separately in a following section.

Another statement that is cited by those seeking to refute the claim that Paul viewed Jesus as a purely heavenly being is a passage from Galatians 4 which states that, "*God sent his Son, born of a woman.*" First of all I don't think it's particularly important whether or not Paul viewed Jesus as purely heavenly or not, but secondly this is by no means a literal

statement by Paul, as he is in the middle of allegorical statements which he himself says are allegorical, and thirdly this is part of a special pleading to a group of people who clearly have had problems with Paul's teachings and he is trying to appeal to them on a new and different level that he feels is more acceptable to them.

First let's look at the passage in question.

Galatians 3:

23 Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. 27 As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 4:

1 My point is this: heirs, as long as they are minors, are no better than slaves, though they are the owners of all the property; 2 but they remain under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father. 3 So with us; while we were minors, we were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the world. 4 **But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. 6 And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir of God through Christ.**

8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods. 9 Now, however, that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits? How can you want to be enslaved to them again? 10 You are observing special days, and months, and seasons, and years. 11 I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted.

12 Brothers, I beg you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong. 13 You know that it was because of a physical infirmity that I first announced the gospel to you; 14 though my condition put

you to the test, you did not scorn or despise me, but welcomed me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. 15 What has become of the goodwill you felt? For I testify that, had it been possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. 16 Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? 17 They make much of you, but for no good purpose; they want to exclude you, so that you may make much of them. 18 It is good to be made much of for a good purpose at all times, and not only when I am present with you. 19 My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, 20 I wish I were present with you now and could change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

21 Tell me, you who desire to be subject to the law, will you not listen to the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and the other by a free woman. 23 One, the child of the slave, was born according to the flesh; the other, the child of the free woman, was born through the promise. 24 **Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. 25 Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother. 27** For it is written,

"Rejoice, you childless one, you who bear no children,
burst into song and shout, you who endure no birth pangs;
for the children of the desolate woman are more numerous
than the children of the one who is married."

28 **Now you, my brothers, are children of the promise, like Isaac. 29 But just as at that time the child who was born according to the flesh persecuted the child who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. 30 But what does the scripture say? "Drive out the slave and her child; for the child of the slave will not share the inheritance with the child of the free woman." 31 So then, brothers, we are children, not of the slave but of the free woman.**

Here Paul is writing to a group of Greeks whom he had previously visited and preached to. This group of people was apparently continuing to celebrate old rites and were falling away from Paul's teachings and were no longer believing in Jesus Christ, as Paul

discussed in an earlier section in Galatians 3. Paul then stated that there are no longer distinctions between Jews and Greeks, and that thus the Jewish god's promise to Abraham now applied to everyone.

Then Paul goes on to tell a story about two women who give birth to children and Paul says that these women represent covenants, and the woman of the promise, "*corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother.*" The woman that Paul is talking about in Galatians 4:4 is an allegorical woman, not a real woman, and in fact this passage provides further evidence that Paul's Jesus was not a historical person. Paul says that the Son of God was born under the law, but the law is in heaven, he is talking about the heavenly covenant.

If Paul were talking about a real woman here, and Jesus' earthly birth, then why does he give no details about the matter? Why not say that he was born to Mary or that he was born in Bethlehem, or anything else? He clearly isn't giving a historical account of anything, but his lack of detail, here and throughout his writings, works against the claim that Paul had knowledge of a historical Jesus. Furthermore, if Paul is describing the birth of "God's Son" in an allegorical way, corresponding to "*the Jerusalem above,*" this only further undermines the notion that Paul could have viewed Jesus as having been born on earth.

In addition to all this, with all of Paul's discussion of the law in Galatians 3 he never once says "Jesus said..." or "Jesus made it known that..." or "Jesus abolished the law....", etc., Paul goes into theological discussions based on the scriptures about law and faith and covenants, developing his own explanation for why the law had been abolished. This is one of many examples where we would expect Paul to have used the teachings of Jesus to make his point if there had been a Jesus who had teachings to cite. Paul doesn't do this however, in all of Paul's discussion about the law and faith and salvation and covenants, etc., he never presents words of Jesus or presents Jesus as the person who made these things known, instead Christ plays a cosmological role in a heavenly drama that brings about salvation through faith, as relayed through scriptural allegories and revelations.

As discussed, both the authentic letters of Paul and the pseudo-Pauline letters contain many statements, dozens of them, that run counter to the notion of a historical Jesus, statements which make no sense at all if Jesus had really just been on earth. In addition to this the letters of Paul are silent on any details that could tie Jesus into history. The one and only statement that could debatably tie Jesus to a person is the passage from Galatians 1:19 about "*the Lord's brother*". Against this one statement we have dozens of contradictory statements and a strikingly large silence on other historical facts, such as who Jesus' parents were, where he was born, when he was born, who killed him, where he was killed, when he was killed, or even teachings and deeds of his. Paul says nothing about any miracles of Jesus, no healing stories, no turning of water into wine, no walking on water, no empty tomb, etc. It's not just that Paul didn't mention these things, Paul was trying very hard to convince people to believe in Jesus Christ, so not telling them about this Jesus person and what he did and said, i.e. the things that proved that this person was

the Son of God, is really inconceivable, especially since most of his audience were not Jews.

What we have from Paul and the other early epistle writers is a heavenly Jesus, whose attributes are no different from the Son of man mentioned in *The Book of Enoch* or other such apocalyptic Jewish stories. Whether Paul viewed Jesus as incarnate in some fashion or having made an appearance on earth itself is difficult to say, but it really makes little difference, since most of the gods and heroes and angels of the time were portrayed as incarnate. The issue is that Paul provides us with no knowledge of a life of Jesus, nothing that places him in space and time, which is rather bizarre if Jesus was a man who had just recently been alive. In addition, Paul said things that outright contradict the notion of Jesus as a man who recently lived.

It is also important to note that Paul never mentions a "second coming" or "return" of Christ, he only states that he will come, but never as though he has already come before.

With all of this we can see that the first writings about "Jesus Christ" do not portray Jesus as a recent person who had been on earth, performed miracles, engaged in teachings, had crowds of followers, and proclaimed his own message. The writings of Paul present Jesus Christ as a "mystery", who was being revealed by Paul and others through the interpretation of scriptures and prophetic writings. His "crucifixion" is described metaphorically and supernaturally, not as a historical event.

One Account, Not Four

The Gospel of Mark is the first story of Jesus that was written, and all others are dependent on it

The origin of the Gospels has always been unknown. At no point has anyone (that we know of) really known who wrote any of the Gospels, when they were written, or even where they were written. Each of the Gospels could have been written anywhere from Egypt to Rome, and the estimated dates for their writing range from around 50 CE at the earliest estimates to about 140 CE at the latest, with a small minority of people proposing dates into the 4th century.

The traditional explanation for the origin of the Gospels has been that they were each written independently by people who were either disciples of Jesus or who received their information from disciples of Jesus. This is called the apostolistic tradition, and according to the apostolistic tradition a Gospel could only be considered "authentic" if it had a direct lineage to an apostle, thus the names assigned to each of the Gospels were given in order to help establish their authenticity.

It has not always been believed, however, that each of the Gospels is an eyewitness account. Indeed the Gospel of Luke explicitly states that it is compiled from the research of the author, and is thus not an eyewitness account.

The earliest account for the origin of some of the Gospels comes to us from the early church leader Papias, from about 130 CE:

Mark being the interpreter of Peter, whatsoever he recorded he wrote with great accuracy, but not, however, in the order in which it was spoken or done by our Lord, for he neither heard nor followed our Lord, but, as before said, was in company with Peter, who gave him such instruction as was necessary, but not to give a history of our Lord's discourses. Wherefore Mark has not erred in any thing, by writing some things as lie has recorded them; for lie was carefully attentive to one thing, not to pass by any thing that he heard, or to state any thing falsely in these accounts. ... Matthew composed his history in the Hebrew dialect, and every one translated it as he was able.

- Papias, 130 CE

Here Papias states that the Gospel called Mark was written by someone named Mark, and that Mark recorded his Gospel from the apostle Peter. He then goes on to state that the Gospel called Matthew was written by someone named Matthew who wrote his Gospel in "the Hebrew dialect," which would have been Aramaic. We'll go ahead and look at one more early explanation for the origin of the Gospels and then analyze these statements.

Around 175 CE the early church leader Irenaeus expounded upon the information of Papias when he gave an account of the origin of each of the four Gospels that later became

canon.

Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.

- Irenaeus; *Against Heresies*, 175 CE

Here Irenaeus basically repeats the statement of Papias, most likely getting his information from Papias, and then adds a statement about the Gospel called Luke and the Gospel called John. There are several problems with what Papias and Irenaeus state, but first let's see what they are saying and why they are saying it.

Early Christian theologians believed the Gospel of Matthew to be the first Gospel that was written, and, by many accounts, the most important (of course there was disagreement among them, as there was on all doctrinal issues). The reason that Matthew was viewed by many as the earliest Gospel and the most important was because it contained the virgin birth story and the lineage to David, and the Gospel of Luke was self-described as not an eyewitness account, so it could not have been the first. Some people claimed that they had seen the original copy of Matthew, and that it was in Aramaic, but the real motivation behind this story of being written "*in the language of the Hebrews*" was an effort to establish its primacy and authority. It makes sense that an account would be written in the same language that Jesus spoke to his followers, yet all of the Gospels were written in Greek, so this idea of an original Hebrew or Aramaic Gospel had a lot of draw to it. Jesus was presumed to have spoken in Aramaic because the Gospels "quote him" as saying things in Aramaic, such as his last words in the crucifixion scenes.

Mark was said to have been a second-hand account which was out of order because events in the Gospel of Mark are the same as in the Gospel of Matthew, but in a different order, and Mark does not contain the virgin birth story so it was seen as less valuable, thus, to resolve the contradiction between the order of events in Mark and Matthew, the idea that Mark was a second-hand account gained favor. The attribution of Peter as the source of information for Mark comes from the fact that in order to be viewed as legitimate the Gospel had to be tied back to an apostle, and the Gospel of Mark seemed to come from Rome due to linguistic reasons, where the "apostle Peter" supposedly preached, as well as the fact that Peter was the most highly esteemed apostle, so Peter was proposed as Mark's source of information.

The Gospel of Luke was obviously not a first-hand account, but the author of Luke is also thought to be the author of the *Acts of the Apostles*, in which there are several "we" passages that refer to Paul, thus the conclusion was that the author of Luke was in the company of Paul and got his information from Paul.

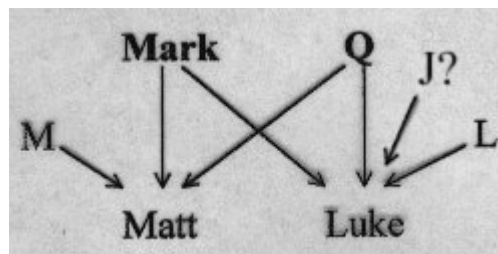
Chapter 21 of Gospel of John states, *"Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them...This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true,"* from which from which Irenaeus and others believed that the author of the Gospel was the disciple John son of Zebedee, because John and James sons of Zebedee are depicted as highly important disciples in the other Gospels, but they aren't mentioned at all in the Gospel of John, so this was explained by saying that John son of Zebedee wrote the Gospel himself, and didn't mention him or his brother out of humility.

There are several problems with all of these explanations however.

Scholars are now certain that the Gospel called Mark was actually the first Gospel that was written, for reasons which will be explained. The idea that Mark got his information from "Peter" does not make sense because the apostle Peter is poorly portrayed in the Gospel of Mark. In Mark's Gospel Peter is portrayed as a fool who doesn't understand the message of Jesus, and thus him being Mark's authoritative source is unlikely at best.

The Gospel of Matthew cannot have been originally written in any language but Greek, because the Gospel of Matthew is copied from the Gospel of Mark (or some version of the Gospel of Mark), which was written in Greek. We will explore this shortly, but the word-for-word similarities between Matthew and Mark are so strong that Matthew had to have been copied directly from either the current version of Mark or a similar earlier version of Mark or from a third source common between the two, but at any rate, Matthew is clearly dependent on Markan text. The biggest change that the author of Matthew made to the Gospel of Mark was the addition of the virgin birth story.

The author of Luke also shares a large quantity of text with both Mark and Matthew, showing that much of Luke is copied from these sources in some fashion. (The dominant theory now is that Matthew and Luke both independently use Mark and a document called "Q") It also would not make sense that Luke got his information from Paul, because Paul plainly stated in his letters that he never saw Jesus, other than through visions. Paul was definitely not a witness to anything in the Gospel stories, which is clear in his own writings. Luke may also be dependent on the writings of the Jewish historian Josephus.



The Gospel of John seems to have been the latest of the Gospels that was written, putting it out of range for having been written by anyone living during the supposed time of Jesus and the supposed signatory passage is really a third party statement, not a self-description, in addition to the fact that Chapter 21, in which it exists, was almost certainly added by a

later hand, not the same person who wrote the bulk of the Gospel. On top of this the Gospel of John, unlike the synoptic Gospels of Mark and Matthew, is written by someone whose first language appears to have been Greek. The Gospel also does not seem to have been written by a Jew, as it frequently refers to "the Jews" as another group of people and in a demeaning way. The dialog of Jesus presented in John is also more complex than the synoptic Gospels and written in such a way that it would not make sense for it to be a Greek interpretation of speeches given in Aramaic or Hebrew, based on the use of things like Greek alliteration. In other words, John uses eloquent Greek prose for the speeches of Jesus. If he were simply giving a literal Greek translation of speeches given in a different language, this wouldn't be the case. All of these things lead to the conclusion that John was most likely written by a native Greek speaking non-Jew after the other Gospels had been written and is most likely influenced by one or more of the synoptic Gospels itself. The Gospel certainly does not appear to have been written by an uneducated fisherman from Galilee, which is who John the disciple is portrayed as in Gospel stories.

Why do we say that Mark was written first and the others were copied from it? This has to do with what is called the "synoptic problem". Basically, so much of the text of Mark, Matthew, and Luke is shared word-for-word that the only explanation can be that there has been extensive copying between the texts. An example of this is shown below:

Mark 11:

28 "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?"
29 Jesus replied, "I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. 30 John's baptism—was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!" 31 They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'" 32 But if we say, 'From men?'" (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.)

Matthew 21:

"By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?"
24 Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. 25 John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?"
They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'" 26 But if we say, 'From men'—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet."

Luke 20:

2 "Tell us by what authority you are doing these things," they said. "Who gave you this authority?"
3 He replied, "I will also ask you a question. Tell me,
4 John's baptism—was it from heaven, or from men?"
5 They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say,

'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Why didn't you believe him?'
6 But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us,
because they are persuaded that John was a prophet."

These types of similarities are prevalent throughout these three works.

While the Gospel called John is different from the synoptics and does not share the same type of word-for-word copying with the others, it does share many specific elements and references that indicate the author of John was at least aware of the synoptic narrative. One example of this can be seen in the crucifixion scene, shown below:

John 19:

23 When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

24 "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it."

This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, "They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." So this is what the soldiers did.

Here the author of John is explicitly drawing a reference to Psalm 22, which is implicitly referenced in Mark and Matthew. John builds on the passage and creates a narrative around it in order to justify the passage, which is a typical trait of John. Whereas the writers of Mark and Matthew often just quoted or paraphrased passages from the "Old Testament", the writer of John builds scenarios that he then relates back to those same passages. The thing is that John ends up referencing many of the same passages that Mark and Matthew reference, the author just does it in a different way. But many of these passages are obscure, such as the casting of lots for clothing, and thus indicate that the author of John is working from one or more of the synoptic narratives.

Of the four Gospels, obviously one of them had to come first, and one of the reasons that Mark is considered the first of the four is indeed the fact that it is the shortest and least detailed. The author of Mark is evidently unaware of any virgin birth story, making no mention whatsoever of it, and the birth stories in Matthew and Luke are both completely different from one another, while they both contain the core of Mark.

It is almost universally accepted by New Testament scholars today that Mark was the first of the narrative Gospels that was written, and that Matthew and Luke are copied from it in some fashion, however this position has only been adopted within the last 200 years. For the majority of time Christians have believed that Matthew was written first, hence the reason that it is the first book in the New Testament. Not only this, but Christians believed that each of the Gospels was written independently.

Why would "Matthew" and "Luke" copy from Mark, and why do we have four different

Gospels, each of which share many points but also contradict each other in critical ways? Because the Gospels after Mark were actually written in opposition to one another. The three other Gospels all build on the story of Mark, but they introduce theological differences. The authors of the other Gospels wrote their versions because of theological differences or enhancements that they wished to introduce to the story. For example, many of the changes made by the authors of Matthew and Luke deal with making Mark's account more compatible with the virgin birth story, since Mark contains story elements which infer that Jesus is the naturally born son of Joseph and Mary.

Far from being four separate eyewitness accounts that just happen to slightly disagree with each other, these four Gospels are a product of theological disagreements among the early Christian community. The writers of these Gospels obviously could not have known that these works would later be compiled together into a single book side by side. The fact that this was done is actually quite ironic, since the writers of these Gospels evidently viewed other Gospels as flawed, hence the reason that they created new versions.

The fact that all three of the other narrative Gospels in the Bible are based directly or indirectly on the Gospel of Mark demonstrates the lack of other narrative information about Jesus. The Gospel of Mark became the root of the other Gospels because it was the only writing that provided narrative details about Jesus. The additions that the authors of Matthew and Luke made to the Gospel of Mark are primarily just the virgin birth narratives, some additional post-resurrection narratives.

There is also language that is shared between the Gospels of Matthew and Luke which is not in the Gospel of Mark. The most well known proposed explanation for this is the "Q" document theory, which purposes that there was some other source document which both the authors of Matthew and Luke used, but was not used by the author of Mark. An equally valid explanation is that both Matthew and Luke are simply based on an expanded version of Mark, or that what we call the Gospel of Mark is a shortened version of the original, which the authors of Matthew and Luke used.

The Gospel of John adds a few additional narrative elements to the synoptic template, but the Gospel of John is a much later Gospel, probably written some 40 to 50 years after the Gospel of Mark. The additional elements in John are basically a gnostic theology element and a "miraculous signs" element, both of which appear to be inventions of the author himself. Some scholars propose that the "miraculous signs" narrative in the Gospel of John is derived from yet another source, but it actually seems to be a narrative element designed by the author as a polemic against the Jews. The "miraculous signs" narrative in John shows Jesus doing many "miraculous signs", but then at the end says that even after all of this the Jews still didn't believe that he was the Son of God. Thus, this narrative advances one of the agendas of the Gospel of John, which is portaging the Jews as unreasonable betrayers of Christ.

Starting With Allegory

The Gospel of Mark shows clear signs of being written as an allegorical fiction

The fact that the Gospel of Mark is the first narrative story of the life of Jesus that was written, and the three other stories about the life of Jesus are dependent on it either directly or indirectly, makes the Gospel of Mark the lynch-pin of the entire Jesus story. Understanding Mark is the key to understanding the whole story of Jesus.

Most scholars today agree that the Gospel of Mark was written either during or after the destruction of Judea by the Romans, which occurred around 70 CE. The most widely accepted dates for the writing of Mark range from between 66 CE to 100 CE, with a fringe of scholars claiming times outside of this range on both sides.

The period in which the Gospel of Mark was written is well known among scholars of ancient literature as an era of allegorical writing. Allegory is defined as follows:

Allegory is a form of extended metaphor, in which objects, persons, and actions in a narrative, are equated with the meanings that lie outside the narrative itself. The underlying meaning has moral, social, religious, or political significance, and characters are often personifications of abstract ideas as charity, greed, or envy.

In essence, an allegory is a symbolic narrative. Allegorical writing was prominent in the Greek speaking world from about the 5th century BCE onward, but there was a particular revival of allegorical writing in the 1st century CE among both Jews and Neo-Platonic Greeks and Romans. Indeed the Jewish writer Philo wrote about symbolic and allegorical interpretation of the Hebrew scriptures shortly before Paul began writing his first letters about Jesus.

Let's take a look at the beginning of the story of Mark, just to get an idea of how this story reads.

Mark 1:

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" ', John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the

thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Note here that the phrase "*the Son of God*" in the first line was probably a later addition to this Gospel, because it is not present in some of the earliest copies that we have, but this is not of critical importance. Just from an initial reading one should be able to see that this is written in a narrative fashion and makes no claims of being a historical account. The Gospel isn't written like other histories of its time, but it is written like other allegorical stories of its time. To get a sense of this we can compare the Gospel of Mark to other historical accounts, by both Jews and Romans, that were written around the same time.

Historical works typically had a table of contents, the authors of the works identified themselves, and they were written in a formal style. We can begin with *The Wars of the Jews*, by Josephus.

WHEREAS the war which the Jews made with the Romans hath been the greatest of all those, not only that have been in our times, but, in a manner, of those that ever were heard of; both of those wherein cities have fought against cities, or nations against nations; while some men who were not concerned in the affairs themselves have gotten together vain and contradictory stories by hearsay, and have written them down after a sophistical manner; and while those that were there present have given false accounts of things, and this either out of a humor of flattery to the Romans, or of hatred

towards the Jews; and while their writings contain sometimes accusations, and sometimes encomiums, but no where the accurate truth of the facts; I have proposed to myself, for the sake of such as live under the government of the Romans, to translate those books into the Greek tongue, which I formerly composed in the language of our country, and sent to the Upper Barbarians; Joseph, the son of Matthias, by birth a Hebrew, a priest also, and one who at first fought against the Romans myself, and was forced to be present at what was done afterwards, [am the author of this work].

Now at the time when this great concussion of affairs happened, the affairs of the Romans were themselves in great disorder. Those Jews also who were for innovations, then arose when the times were disturbed; they were also in a flourishing condition for strength and riches, insomuch that the affairs of the East were then exceeding tumultuous, while some hoped for gain, and others were afraid of loss in such troubles; for the Jews hoped that all of their nation which were beyond Euphrates would have raised an insurrection together with them.

- Josephus; *The Wars of the Jews*, 70 CE

This is the preface to Josephus' account of the war between the Jews and the Romans that lasted from 66 to 70 CE, resulting in the destruction of Judea. As you can see, this reads like a work of history. This was also written at pretty much the same time that the Gospel of Mark was probably written.

We can also look at *History of Rome*, written by the Roman historian Livy around 30 BCE.

To begin with, it is generally admitted that after the capture of Troy, whilst the rest of the Trojans were massacred, against two of them--Aeneas and Antenor--the Achivi refused to exercise the rights of war, partly owing to old ties of hospitality, and partly because these men had always been in favour of making peace and surrendering Helen. Their subsequent fortunes were different. Antenor sailed into the furthest part of the Adriatic, accompanied by a number of Enetians who had been driven from Paphlagonia by a revolution and after losing their king Pylaemenes before Troy were looking for a settlement and a leader. The combined force of Enetians and Trojans defeated the Euganei, who dwelt between the sea and the Alps and occupied their land. The place where they disembarked was called Troy, and the name was extended to the surrounding district; the whole nation were called Veneti. Similar misfortunes led to Aeneas becoming a wanderer but the Fates were preparing a higher destiny for him. He first visited Macedonia, then was carried down to Sicily in quest of a settlement; from Sicily he directed his course to the Laurentian territory. Here, too, the name of Troy is

found, and here the Trojans disembarked, and as their almost infinite wanderings had left them nothing but their arms and their ships, they began to plunder the neighbourhood. The Aborigines, who occupied the country, with their king Latinus at their head came hastily together from the city and the country districts to repel the inroads of the strangers by force of arms.

From this point there is a twofold tradition. According to the one, Latinus was defeated in battle, and made peace with Aeneas, and subsequently a family alliance. According to the other, whilst the two armies were standing ready to engage and waiting for the signal, Latinus advanced in front of his lines and invited the leader of the strangers to a conference.

- Livy; *History of Rome*, 30 BCE

Whether these things are actually true or not is debatable, but there is no debate about the fact that Livy was writing a history that he believed to be factual and straight forward, not metaphorical or allegorical.

We can also look at the works of Tacitus, which were written shortly after the Gospel of Mark was probably written.

I BEGIN my work with the time when Servius Galba was consul for the second time with Titus Vinius for his colleague. Of the former period, the 820 years dating from the founding of the city, many authors have treated; and while they had to record the transactions of the Roman people, they wrote with equal eloquence and freedom. After the conflict at Actium, and when it became essential to peace, that all power should be centered in one man, these great intellects passed away. Then too the truthfulness of history was impaired in many ways; at first, through men's ignorance of public affairs, which were now wholly strange to them, then, through their passion for flattery, or, on the other hand, their hatred of their masters. And so between the enmity of the one and the servility of the other, neither had any regard for posterity. But while we instinctively shrink from a writer's adulation, we lend a ready ear to detraction and spite, because flattery involves the shameful imputation of servility, whereas malignity wears the false appearance of honesty. I myself knew nothing of Galba, of Otho, or of Vitellius, either from benefits or from injuries. I would not deny that my elevation was begun by Vespasian, augmented by Titus, and still further advanced by Domitian; but those who profess inviolable truthfulness must speak of all without partiality and without hatred. I have reserved as an employment for my old age, should my life be long enough, a subject at once more fruitful and less anxious in the reign of the Divine Nerva and the empire of Trajan, enjoying the rare happiness of

times, when we may think what we please, and express what we think.

I am entering on the history of a period rich in disasters, frightful in its wars, torn by civil strife, and even in peace full of horrors. Four emperors perished by the sword. There were three civil wars; there were more with foreign enemies; there were often wars that had both characters at once.

- Tacitus; *The Histories*, 109 CE

As you can see, there was definitely such a thing as formal history at the time that the Gospels were written, and the Gospel of Mark, upon which all of the others are based, does not read at all like a formal history, it reads like an allegorical story. Mark develops characters and has a plot, with scenes, suspense, and a climax. One of the interesting subplots in Mark deals with John the Baptist. The beginning of Mark 1 is as follows:

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" ', John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. **Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist,** and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

The section in bold is a paraphrase of 2 Kings 2:8, which reads:

They replied, '**He was a man with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist.**' The king said, 'That was Elijah the Tishbite.'

The author of Mark doesn't indicate that he is referencing the Hebrew scriptures here, but he uses a scripture that identifies Elijah. Later in the story (Mark 9), the disciples ask Jesus about the teaching that Elijah would come before the "Son of Man", as shown below:

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean. Then they asked him, 'Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?' He said to them, 'Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt? **But I tell you that**

**Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased,
as it is written about him.'**

Here the author of Mark tells the reader that Elijah has already come, but he doesn't explain what that means. The reader has to figure out that John the Baptist is Elijah, which can only be done by making the connection between Mark 1:6 and 2 Kings 2:8. Obviously these types of twists and riddles are written into the text on purpose for literary and mystical value, this isn't how someone would write a historical work.

If Mark is an allegorical story, then what is Mark about, why did the author write it, and why is it about someone called Jesus Christ?

In 67 CE the Judean Jews instigated armed conflict against the Roman occupation of Judea, which led to a major war that resulted in the absolute destruction of Jerusalem by 70 CE, and the total destruction of their temple.

The Gospel of Mark appears to have been written *in response to* this conflict. It may have been written during the war between the Jews and Romans, or shortly thereafter. The main thrust of the story is that the Judean Jews brought destruction upon themselves. This is not at all unusual, indeed this was a common opinion among both Jews and non-Jews and was also expressed, though in a different way, by the Jewish writer Josephus. Indeed many Jews blamed themselves for their plight and for the destruction of their state by the Romans. This self-blaming of the Jews follows a clear tradition in ancient Jewish culture and literature and is expressed repeatedly throughout the Hebrew scriptures. This is because the Jews were often dominated by foreign rulers. Jewish scriptures and literature saw the plights of the Jews as being a result of their inability to properly please their god. For this reason, Jewish literature prior to the writing of the Gospels was often pessimistic and full of self-admonishments and stories of suffering. One of the many examples of this is Psalm 74, which was supposedly written some time around 900 BCE.

1 Why have you rejected us forever, O God? Why does your anger smolder against the sheep of your pasture?

2 Remember the people you purchased of old, the tribe of your inheritance, whom you redeemed— Mount Zion, where you dwelt.

3 Turn your steps toward these everlasting ruins, all this destruction the enemy has brought on the sanctuary.

4 Your foes roared in the place where you met with us; they set up their standards as signs.

5 They behaved like men wielding axes to cut through a thicket of trees.

6 They smashed all the carved paneling with their axes and hatchets.

7 They burned your sanctuary to the ground; they defiled the dwelling place of your Name.

...

- *Psalm 74*; Asaph

As you can see, it would be easy to call this a prophesy for the destruction of Judea in 70 CE, but the fact is that it isn't, it's just a song that was written during some other time when the Israelites were suffering the occupation of another conquering civilization. The author of the song wasn't trying to predict events or think about the future, he was writing about experiences that they were having at that moment. Here is another example, Psalm 2, supposedly written around 1000 BCE by David:

1 Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?

2 The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his anointed one.

3 "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters."

4 The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.

5 Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,

6 "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill."

7 I will proclaim the decree of the LORD : He said to me, "You are my Son ; today I have become your Father.

...

- *Psalm 2*; David

Here we see another song that when taken out of context could easily be turned into a supposed prophesy for Jesus, but the reality is that this is just an old song, it's not a prophesy for anything. It should also be noted that "anointed one" in this song, and in most of the pre-Christian Jewish contexts, simply meant king.

The point is that both the Jewish scriptures and the other apocalyptic and messianic literature are filled with stories of suffering, destruction, being rejected by God, "anointed ones" (messiahs), sons of God, redemptive sacrifices, etc.

Some of these suffering and "son of God" stories are the basis for the Jesus Christ figure or are the traditions out of which the Jesus Christ figure emerged.

As Jews continuously faced problems and setbacks they asked themselves "why", and their answer was often that bad things happen to them because they failed to properly worship their god and hold his commandments. The Gospel of Mark just builds on this tradition, writing a story about a savior who is unrecognized by the Jews and eventually killed by them. There are many Jewish stories where a certain faction of Jews are blamed for bringing destruction on Jews as a whole. In the story of Mark the killing of Jesus serves an allegorical role. "Mark" presents the killing of Jesus as the reason for the destruction of Judea. The author of Mark is writing either during the war or shortly after it, and basically the rejection of Jesus by the Jews is symbolic of the failure of the Jews to keep the favor of their god, resulting in the destruction brought upon them by the Romans. This type of mentality was really typical of ancient Jewish culture and nothing new, surprising, or unique, though it may have seemed new and unique to many non-Jews.

Why is "Jesus Christ" a character in "Mark's" story? Due to many similarities between the Gospel of Mark and the Pauline letters it seems that the writer was a follower of a Pauline sect. The concept of "Jesus Christ" as a crucified savior did come before the writing of the Gospel of Mark, and the Gospel of Mark does correspond to the idea of Jesus as a crucified savior figure, so the author of Mark was influenced by some preexisting tradition, but there was probably no biographical information about Jesus before Mark (for reasons we will discuss). The author of Mark probably made all of the biographical information up himself based on the existing "Old Testament" scriptures.

It is quite likely that the Gospel of Mark is primarily a story that reflects the personal views of the author. As we will explore in the next section, the Gospels, especially the Gospel of Mark, are based heavily on the Hebrew scriptures. It is significant that the very first scriptural reference in the Gospel of Mark refers to a passage in the Hebrew scriptures that talks about the destruction of Israel.

Mark 1:

1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ[, the Son of God.]

2 It is written in Isaiah the prophet:

**"I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way"—**

3 "a voice of one calling in the desert,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.'"

4 And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Mark 1:2 refers to Malachi 3:1. The entire book of Malachi is about God's destruction of Israel because he is angry at them.

Malachi 2

"And now this admonition is for you, O priests. 2 If you do not listen, and if you do not set your heart to honor my name," says the LORD Almighty, "I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not set your heart to honor me.

3 "Because of you I will rebuke your descendants ; I will spread on your faces the offal from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it.

...

10 Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?

11 Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated

the sanctuary the LORD loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. 12 As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the LORD cut him off from the tents of Jacob —even though he brings offerings to the LORD Almighty.

13 Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. 14 You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

...

17 You have wearied the LORD with your words.

"How have we wearied him?" you ask.

By saying, "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them" or "Where is the God of justice?"

Malachi 3:

1 "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

2 But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?

The entire book of Malachi serves as a backdrop for the Gospel of Mark, and we can see with the very first literary reference that is made by the author of Mark, that this is a story talking about the destruction of Israel.

These types of references and themes persist throughout the entire Gospel of Mark. Another example from the beginning of Mark is the calling of the fishermen, which has a quite different meaning when you know the underlying subtext of the passage.

Mark 1:

14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

16 As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. **17 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."** 18 At once they left their nets and followed him.

This refers to a passage in Jeremiah 16, which is again talking about the destruction of Israel.

Jeremiah 16:

5 For this is what the LORD says: "Do not enter a house where

there is a funeral meal; do not go to mourn or show sympathy, because I have withdrawn my blessing, my love and my pity from this people," declares the LORD. 6 "Both high and low will die in this land. They will not be buried or mourned, and no one will cut himself or shave his head for them. 7 No one will offer food to comfort those who mourn for the dead—not even for a father or a mother—nor will anyone give them a drink to console them.

8 "And do not enter a house where there is feasting and sit down to eat and drink. 9 For this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Before your eyes and in your days I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom in this place.

...

14 "However, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when men will no longer say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,' 15 but they will say, 'As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.' For I will restore them to the land I gave their forefathers.

16 "But now I will send for many fishermen," declares the LORD, "and they will catch them. After that I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them down on every mountain and hill and from the crevices of the rocks. 17 My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from me, nor is their sin concealed from my eyes. 18 I will repay them double for their wickedness and their sin, because they have defiled my land with the lifeless forms of their vile images and have filled my inheritance with their detestable idols."

This is an interestingly subversive reference, like many in the Gospel of Mark. This is the only instance in the Old Testament of fishermen catching people, and is surely the inspiration of Mark 1:17.

One of the arguments that has often been used to claim that the Gospels reflect authentic history is the recognition that, especially in the Gospel of Mark, the disciples are poorly portrayed. The argument states that the Gospels must be telling the truth because they present such an unflattering picture of the disciples, that anyone who was fabricating the story would have presented them in a better light. But this presumes that the author of Mark, who set the tone for all the other Gospels, was writing history and writing something that was intended to be a foundational document for the beginning of a new religion about Jesus, and that he would have wanted to portray the disciples well. Indeed this is not the case. The author of Mark was writing an allegorical story that intentionally portrayed the Jews and the disciples as failures, the purpose of which was to explain why Jerusalem was utterly destroyed. The Gospel of Mark is a story about failure, destruction, and despair. This is critical to understand for the entire Gospel. This is why the author of

Mark has Jesus die on the cross, quoting from Psalm 22, saying *"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"*

The original ending of Mark indicates that after Jesus had risen nothing happened. There are actually four different endings to Mark, but scholars agree that the ending most likely to be original is the shortest one, that ends with the women who had found the empty tomb being afraid and saying nothing. This would indicate that the author of Mark is saying that they had dropped the ball, and this symbolizes a further failure of the Jews, presumably responsible for their woes.

Mark 16:

And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?' When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.' So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Throughout the Gospel of Mark the author sets up scenes where Jews are wrong and fail, but Gentiles are good and become blessed. We see this in several places, but one of the most notable is the scene where Jesus rebukes Peter and tells the crowd that those who will come after him must take up their cross and follow him.

Mark 8:

31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. 32 He spoke plainly about this, and **Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.**

33 **But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."**

34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: **"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.**

This scene is a foreshadowing of the events leading up to the crucifixion, where the author has someone named Simon carry Jesus' cross. Peter's original name was Simon, but throughout the Gospel of Mark Peter constantly does the wrong things, and eventually denies Jesus. In the end, it is a different Simon who carries his cross.

Mark 15:

20 And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

21 **A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.**

Cyrene was a Gentile city and Alexander and Rufus are Gentile names. Cyrene is also noted in Acts to have been the location of the first "Gentile church". This was all said in order to clearly establish that this person was not a Jew, but rather a Gentile who just happened to be passing through. This Simon, or the sons mentioned, may also have been a known figure in the Cyrene Christian community, whom Mark has placed within the narrative.

This again is just a building of the symbolism in the story, showing the failures of the Jews, especially the so-called disciples, while putting Gentiles in positive roles.

The Gospel of Mark is indeed a polemic story, and it's not entirely clear if it was written by a self-critical Jew or by an anti-Jewish non-Jew, but I tend to think that it was written by a self-critical Jew. The anti-Jewish attitude of the Gospel of Mark reverberates throughout all of the canonical Gospels, which are directly or indirectly based on it, and have contributed to so many generations of Jewish persecution by Christians.

The Gospel of Mark makes sense as allegory, but it does not make sense as literally true history, and due to the style that it is written in, as well as the fact that the author was obviously aware of the fact that he was basing the events of his story on scriptural references, as we shall explore next, it is almost certain that the author himself wrote the story as allegory, with no intention that it be taken as literal history. The Gospel of Mark does not proclaim itself to be history, nor does it proclaim itself to be divinely inspired, nor does it proclaim itself to be an authoritative religious document. The Gospel of Mark is an unsigned allegorical commentary on the destruction of Jerusalem, and makes no pretense of being anything other than that. It was other people who claimed it to be something more.

Prophecy or Plagiarism?

Virtually every detail of the life of Jesus comes from "Old Testament" scriptures

Many people ask, "If Jesus didn't exist, then where did these stories come from?" "How would these stories emerge if someone did not in-fact inspire them?"

Not only is the overall concept of the Jesus story based on the apocalyptic and messianic literature that came before it, but pretty much every detail of the life of Jesus as presented in the Gospels relates back to some prior Hebrew scripture, mostly from the scriptures that we now call the Old Testament, though some elements of the Gospels appear to be based on other non-scriptural works as well. The life of Jesus is a story that was created by combining elements from many other Hebrew stories to create a proto-typical savior figure. Christians have traditionally used the parallels between the story of Jesus and the Hebrew scriptures to claim that Jesus fulfilled many prophecies from the "Old Testament", but there are several problems with this claim.

First of all, even if every parallel between the story of Jesus and the Hebrew scriptures related back to a genuine prophecy there would still be nothing to show that the authors of the Gospels didn't simply base their stories on the prophecies. They would have known exactly what to write in order to "fulfill" the prophecies and we have nothing independent of the Gospels to attest to any of this.

Secondly, many of the parallels between the story of Jesus and the Hebrew scriptures don't relate back to prophecies, they simply relate back to other stories about different people, or simply to songs and poems.

Thirdly, as we will discuss later, some of the key elements of the Jesus story are based on mistranslations of the Hebrew scriptures, showing clearly that the authors of the Gospels were basing their accounts of Jesus on other texts and that there is no way to call those accounts "prophesy fulfillment".

There are three basic ways in which the Gospels relate back to the Hebrew scriptures: Where the author explicitly references the scriptures, where the author uses scriptures for underlying themes, and where the author quotes or paraphrases scriptures without indicating that they have done so.

Let us give these three types of references designations:

- Type 1 (T1) : Author explicitly references Hebrew scriptures
- Type 2 (T2) : Author uses Hebrew scriptures for underlying theme
- Type 3 (T3) : Author quotes or paraphrases Hebrew scripture without indicating they have done so (implicit reference)

Now let's look at examples for each of these types of references.

Type 1:

John 12:

12 The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. 13 So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting,

'Hosanna!

*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—
the King of Israel!'*

14 Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written:

*15 'Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.
Look, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey's colt!'*

16 His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.

This passage in John refers to Zechariah 9, which discusses the judgment of the enemies of Israel and the coming of a warrior who will lead the Israelites against their enemies:

Zechariah 9:

9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!

Lo, your king comes to you;

triumphant and victorious is he,

humble and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

10 I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim

and the warhorse from Jerusalem;

and the battle-bow shall be cut off,

and he shall command peace to the nations;

his dominion shall be from sea to sea,

and from the River to the ends of the earth.

Type 2:

Isaiah 53 is known as the passage of the "Suffering Servant". The passage actually starts in Isaiah 52 with lamentations about the occupation of Israel by foreign rulers and the selling of Jews into slavery. Isaiah 53 is seen as an underlying theme for the entire story of Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 53:

Who has believed what we have heard?

And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him of no account.

Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
By a perversion of justice he was taken away.
Who could have imagined his future?
For he was cut off from the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people.
They made his grave with the wicked
and his tomb with the rich,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain.
When you make his life an offering for sin,
he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days;
through him the will of the Lord shall prosper.
Out of his anguish he shall see light;
he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.
The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.
Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;
because he poured out himself to death,
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

Type 3:

The crucifixion scene in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew (Matthew's is copied from Mark with some minor additions) is based on Psalm 22. Psalm 69 and Isaiah 50 are also referenced, and Matthew adds on an allusion to Ezekiel 37 as well as some other references.

New Testament	Old Testament
<p>Matthew 27: 30 They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. 31 After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.</p> <p>32 As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. 33 They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). 34 There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. 35 When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 36 And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. 37 Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS. 38 Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"</p> <p>41 In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. 42 "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in</p>	<p>Isaiah 50: 6 I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.</p> <p>Amos 2: 11 I also raised up prophets from among your sons and Nazirites from among your young men. Is this not true, people of Israel?' declares the LORD. 12 'But you made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets not to prophesy.</p> <p>Psalm 22: 1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? ... 7 All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: 8 "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him." ... 16 Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. 17 I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me</p>

him. 43 **He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him,** for he said, 'I am the Son of God.' " 44 In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

45 **From the sixth hour* until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land.** 46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**"

47 When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah.

48 Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. **He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink.** 49 The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. **The earth shook and the rocks split. 52 The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. 53 They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.**

* The sixth hour is noon

18 **They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.**

Psalm 69:

Insults have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. **They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.**

Amos 8:

8 **"Will not the land tremble for this,** and all who live in it mourn? ... 9 **"In that day," declares the Sovereign LORD, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.**

Ezekiel 37:

12 Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: **O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. 14 I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.'** "

The crucifixion scenes in Matthew and Mark do not openly indicate that they are based on other scriptures, but the details of the scenes are nevertheless drawn directly from the older scriptures.

Psalms 22 and 69 are not prophecies at all, they are lamentation songs, and thus the similarities between the psalms and the Gospel stories could not be called "prophecy fulfillment" under any circumstance. In addition, the phrase "*they have pierced my hands and my feet*" is a mistranslation, and is not a part of the Hebrew text, but is a later variant of a Greek translation of the text.

Now, when it comes to the question of whether the crucifixion accounts of Mark and Matthew are historical, the fact that the scenes are clearly inspired by Isaiah 53, and parts of them are directly copied from Psalm 22, Psalm 69, Ezekiel 37, etc. means that the authors are not writing from either their own witnessing of the event or from a secondary telling of the account, they are writing from the scriptures. Their source for the story is the older scriptures - well, Mark's source is the older scriptures, and Matthew's source is Mark plus his own additional references.

Clearly the story of the crucifixion of Jesus doesn't require a real event for its inspiration, all of the ideas needed to inspire the story already existed in the scriptures.

The thing is, the entire story of Jesus follows this pattern. Pretty much every detail of the life of Jesus comes from the existing literature from before his supposed time. To get an idea of the extent to which this is the case we can look at one of the Gospels and identify the scriptural basis for the events in the story of Jesus. A lot of these references are the same across all the Gospels, so I will just use the Gospel of Matthew here because it contains the most events and much of it is copied from Mark.

The following is an outline of the story of Jesus, based on the outline provided by the New International Version (NIV) Bible, with references to the passages in what we call the Old Testament that serve as the basis for the elements of the story as told by the author of Matthew. I use T1, T2, and T3 to designate the type of reference that is used. I won't present every quote due to length, but I will present some of the key quotes. I am also leaving out all of the parables because I am concerned here with the supposed events of the life of Jesus, i.e. the plot of the story.

Birth of Jesus:

T1: Matthew 1:2 - Isaiah 7:14 (based on Greek mistranslation):

"Then Isaiah said, 'Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.'" (Note: This is a mistranslation that will be addressed in the next section.)

T2: Matthew 1 - Isaiah 9:6:

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Born in Bethlehem:

T1: Matthew 2:5 - Micah 5:2:

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of

you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

Escape to Egypt:

T1: Matthew 2:15 - Hosea 11:1:

"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son."

Massacre of the Innocents:

T1: Matthew 2:17 - Jeremiah 31:15

T2: Matthew 2:16 - Exodus 1:22

"Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: 'Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.'"

The Return to Nazareth:

T1: Matthew 2:23 - Judges 13:5:

"because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines." (Note: Jesus was called a Nazorean in the gospels because he supposedly lived in a place called Nazareth, but this refers to Samson being from a Nazirite sect. The author himself made the reference however)

John the Baptist Prepares the Way:

T1: Matthew 3:3 - Isaiah 40:3:

"A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the LORD ;make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.'"

T3: Matthew 3:4 - 2 Kings 2:8:

"They replied, 'He was a man with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist.' The king said, 'That was Elijah the Tishbite.'" (Note: Matthew 3:4 says: "John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist." Later in the story Jesus indicates that John was Elijah.)

The Temptation of Jesus:

T1: Matthew 4:6 - Psalm 91:11,12

T1: Matthew 4:7 - Deuteronomy 6:16

T1: Matthew 4:10 - Deuteronomy 6:13

Jesus Begins to Preach in Galilee:

T1: Matthew 4:12 - Isaiah 9:1:

"Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan"

Jesus Heals the Sick:

T2: Matthew 4:23 - Isaiah 53

Sermon on the Mount:

T2: Matthew 5-7 - Exodus 19...:

(Note: The Sermon on the Mount {which is only in the Gospel of Matthew} refers to how only Moses was allowed up the mountain in Exodus, but Jesus brings everyone up the mountain. Jesus then gives new interpretations of the Commandments and Laws {from Exodus 20...})

Jesus Heals Many:

T2: Matthew 8 - Isaiah 53

Jesus Calms the Storm:

T2: Matthew 8:27 - Job 30:22, Isaiah 25:4, Zechariah 9:14, Psalm 89:9, Psalm 148:8, Psalm 107:

"28 Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out from their distress; 29 he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed."

Jesus Heals a Paralytic:

T2: Matthew 9:6 - Isaiah 53

T2: Matthew 9:6 - Isaiah 35:5-6:

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy."

Jesus Consorts with Sinners:

T1: Matthew 9:12 - Hosea 6:6:

"For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings."

A Dead Girl and a Sick Woman:

T2: Matthew 9:22 - Isaiah 53

T2: Matthew 9:25 - Isaiah 26:19:

"But your dead will live; their bodies will rise"

Jesus Heals the Blind and Mute:

T2: Matthew 9:29 - Isaiah 53

T2: Matthew 9:6 - Isaiah 35:5-6

Jesus Sends Out the Twelve:

T2: Matthew 10 - Joshua 4:1-2

"...the LORD said to Joshua, 'Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe...' (Note: The number 12 is used throughout the "Old Testament" to represent 12 people, 12 rulers, 12 tribes, 12 special objects, etc. Also, Joshua and Jesus are the same name in Hebrew.)

T1: Matthew 10:34 - Micah 7:6

Jesus and John the Baptist:

T2: Matthew 11:5 - Isaiah 53

T1: Matthew 11:10 - Malachi 3:

"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty."

Woe on Unrepentant Cities:

T2: Matthew 11:20 - Genesis 19

God's Chosen Servant:

T2: Matthew 12:17 - Isaiah 53

T1: Matthew 12:17 - Isaiah 42:1-4:

"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope."

Jesus and Beelzebub:

T2: Matthew 12:24 - 2 Kings 1:1-4

The Sign of Jonah:

T1: Matthew 12:40 - Jonah 1:17

Jesus Walks on the Water:

T2: Matthew 14:25 - Isaiah 43:5-6:

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. ... For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;" (Note: Walking on water was also a theme in Greek hero literature)

The Demand for a Sign:

T2: Matthew 16:4 - Jonah 1:17

T2: Matthew 16:1 - Genesis 19

Jesus Predicts His Death:

T2: Matthew 16:21 - Isaiah 53

The Transfiguration:

T2: Matthew 17:2 - Exodus 34:29:

"When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD."

T2: Matthew 17:2 - Daniel 12:2-4:

"Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the dome, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. But you, Daniel, keep the words secret and the book sealed until the time of the end." (Note: This shows the transfiguration as a foreshadowing of the resurrection)

T2: Matthew 17:11 - Isaiah 40:3

(Note: The symbolism in the transfiguration scene also reflects stories about Moses in the

Hebrew midrash, as well as typical the sun-god imagery of the Greeks. See also: Philo, *On the Life of Moses II*, (288) "And some time afterwards, when he was about to depart from hence to heaven, to take up his abode there, and leaving this mortal life to become immortal, having been summoned by the Father, who now changed him, having previously been a double being, composed of soul and body, into the nature of a single body, transforming him wholly and entirely into a most sun-like mind;"

The Healing of a Boy With a Demon:

T2: Matthew 17:17 - Isaiah 53

Jesus Again Predicts His Death:

T2: Matthew 20:18 - Isaiah 53

T2: Matthew 20:18 - Jonah 1:17

T2: Matthew 20:19 - Psalm 22

Two Blind Men Receive Sight:

T2: Matthew 20:29 - Isaiah 53

T2: Matthew 9:6 - Isaiah 35:5

The Triumphal Entry:

T1: Matthew 21:2 - Zechariah 9:9:

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

T3: Matthew 21:9 - Psalm 118:26

Jesus at the Temple:

T1: Matthew 21:12 - Isaiah 56:7

"...for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."

T2: Matthew 21:12 - Zechariah 14.21:

"Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the LORD Almighty, and all who come to sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them. And on that day there will no longer be a merchant in the house of the LORD Almighty."

T2: Matthew 21:12 - Nehemiah 13:4-9:

"And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the room [in the temple]. Then I gave orders and they cleansed the chambers, and I brought back the vessels of the house of God, with the grain-offering and the frankincense."

T2: Matthew 21:12 - Hosea 9:15

"Because of their sinful deeds, I will drive them out of my house."

The Fig Tree Withers:

T2: Matthew 21:19 - Hosea 9

"I Do not rejoice, O Israel; do not be jubilant like the other nations. For you have been unfaithful to your God; ... 7 The days of punishment are coming, the days of reckoning are at hand. Let Israel know this. Because your sins are so many and your hostility so great, the prophet is considered a fool, the inspired man a maniac. 8 The prophet, along with my

God, is the watchman over Ephraim, yet snares await him on all his paths, and hostility in the house of his God. 9 They have sunk deep into corruption, as in the days of Gibeah. God will remember their wickedness and punish them for their sins. 10 'When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your fathers, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree. But when they came to Baal Peor, they consecrated themselves to that shameful idol and became as vile as the thing they loved. 15'... Because of their sinful deeds, I will drive them out of my house. I will no longer love them; all their leaders are rebellious. 16 Ephraim is blighted, their root is withered, they yield no fruit. Even if they bear children, I will slay their cherished offspring.' 17 My God will reject them because they have not obeyed him; they will be wanderers among the nations."

Signs of the End of the Age:

T3: Matthew 24 - Daniel 9:24-27:

"Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven weeks, and sixty-two weeks. It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two week, the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one week. In the middle of the week he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."

T3: Matthew 24 - Daniel 11:31, 12:11

T3: Matthew 24 - Isaiah 13:8-11

"Terror will seize them, pain and anguish will grip them; they will writhe like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at each other, their faces aflame. See, the day of the LORD is coming—a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger—to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless."

T3: Matthew 24 - Isaiah 34

"1 Come near, you nations, and listen; pay attention, you peoples! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, the world, and all that comes out of it! 2 The LORD is angry with all nations; his wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, he will give them over to slaughter. 3 Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood. 4 All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. 5 My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; see, it descends in judgment on Edom, the people I have totally destroyed. 6

The sword of the LORD is bathed in blood, it is covered with fat— the blood of lambs and goats..."

Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus:

T2: Matthew 26:14 - Amos 2

"4 This is what the LORD says: 'For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. ... 5 I will send fire upon Judah that will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem.' 6 '... They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. ... 11 I also raised up prophets from among your sons and Nazirites from among your young men. Is this not true, people of Israel?' declares the LORD. 12 'But you made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets not to prophesy. 13 Now then, I will crush you as a cart crushes when loaded with grain. (Note: The distinction between "Judas" and "Judah" is a part of English translation. In the original Greek they were both written as "Ioudas", thus these names were the same.)

The Lord's Supper:

T2: Matthew 26:20 - Psalm 41:9:

"Even the friend whom I trusted, who ate at my table, exults in my misfortune."

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial:

T1: Matthew 26:31 - Zechariah 13:7:

"'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!' declares the LORD Almighty. 'Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones"

Jesus' Prayers of the Cup at Gethsemane:

T2: Matthew 26:36 - Psalm 16:5

"LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure."

Jesus Arrested:

T2: Matthew 26:55 - Isaiah 53:7-8:

"...he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken."

Peter Disowns Jesus:

T1: Matthew 27:72 - Zechariah 13:7

Judas Hangs Himself:

T1: Matthew 27:4-10 - Zechariah 11:12-13:

T2: Matthew 27:4-10 - Jeremiah 19, Jeremiah 32

The Soldiers Mock Jesus :

T3: Matthew 27:27 - Flaccus IV ; Philo (Note: The mocking of people as kings was a common practice at the time, one such event was recorded by the Jewish writer Philo, and may be the basis for the mocking of Jesus scene):

"(36) There was a certain madman named Carabbas ... and setting him up there on high that he might be seen by everybody, flattened out a leaf of papyrus and put it on his head instead of a diadem, and clothed the rest of his body with a common door mat instead of a cloak and instead of a scepter they put in his hand a small stick of the native papyrus which they found lying by the way side and gave to him; (38) and when, like actors in theatrical spectacles, he had received all the insignia of royal authority, and had been dressed and adorned like a king, the young men bearing sticks on their shoulders stood on each side of him instead of spear-bearers, in imitation of the bodyguards of the king, and then others came up, some as if to salute him, and others making as though they wished to plead their causes before him, and others pretending to wish to consult with him about the affairs of the state. (39) Then from the multitude of those who were standing around there arose a wonderful shout of men calling out Maris!; and this is the name by which it is said that they call the kings among the Syrians; for they knew that Agrippa [King Herod of the Jews] was by birth a Syrian, and also that he was possessed of a great district of Syria of which he was the sovereign;"

T3: Matthew 27:30 - Isaiah 50

The Crucifixion of Jesus:

T2: Matthew 27:32-44 - Isaiah 53

T3: Matthew 27:32-44 - Psalm 22

T3: Matthew 27:32-44 - Amos 2

T3: Matthew 27:32-44 - Psalm 69

T3: Matthew 27:45 - Amos 8

The Death of Jesus:

T2: Matthew 27:32-44 - Isaiah 53

T3: Matthew 27:32-44 - Psalm 22

T3: Matthew 27:32-44 - Psalm 69

T2: Matthew 27:52 - Ezekiel 37:11-13

The Burial of Jesus:

T2: Matthew 26:57 - Deuteronomy 21:22-23:

"If a man has committed a sin worthy of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree [or plank], his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day, for he who is hanged is the curse of God, so that you do not defile your land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance."

T2: Matthew 26:57 - Isaiah 53:9:

"They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth." (Note: Jesus was placed in the tomb of a rich man)

The Resurrection

T2: Matthew 28:7 - Isaiah 26:19:

"Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead."

T2: Matthew 28:7 - Ezekiel 37:

"1 The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. 2 He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. 3 He said to me, 'Mortal, can these bones live?' I answered, 'O Lord God, you know.' 4 Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. 5 Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause spirit to enter you, and you shall live. 6 I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put spirit in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.'"

T2: Matthew 28:7 - Daniel 12:2-4:

"Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the dome, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. But you, Daniel, keep the words secret and the book sealed until the time of the end."

(Note: The resurrection of Jesus was portrayed as a sign of the end and as an indication that it was time for the resurrection for all people)

As you can see, essentially the entire story of Jesus can be told from the writings that preceded it. The Jesus character in the Gospels is an archetypal figure drawn straight from the Hebrew scriptures, with an influence from the surrounding Greek culture as well.

Because of the fact that the Gospel of Mark is the root of all the Gospels, especially the synoptic Gospels, it is interesting to note how specific scriptural references made by the author of Mark became changed and somewhat lost by the later authors who copied from the Gospel of Mark. Perhaps the best example of this is the cursing of the fig tree.

The cursing of the fig tree in the Gospel of Mark is clearly based on an Old Testament scripture, but the writer of Matthew does not seem to have recognized this and lost the reference. Here is the cursing of the fig tree from the Gospel of Mark.

Mark 11:

12 The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. 13 **Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs.** 14 **Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again."** And his disciples heard him say it.

15 **On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there.** He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, 16 and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. 17

And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written:

"'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

18 The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

19 When evening came, they went out of the city.

20 **In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots.** 21 Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"

This entire scene is based on Hosea 9, and refers to the destruction of Israel.

Hosea 9:

1 Do not rejoice, O Israel; do not be jubilant like the other nations. For you have been unfaithful to your God; ... 7 The days of punishment are coming, the days of reckoning are at hand. Let Israel know this. Because your sins are so many and your hostility so great, the prophet is considered a fool, the inspired man a maniac. 8 The prophet, along with my God, is the watchman over Ephraim, yet snares await him on all his paths, and hostility in the house of his God. 9 They have sunk deep into corruption, as in the days of Gibeah. God will remember their wickedness and punish them for their sins. 10 'When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert; **when I saw your fathers, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree.** But when they came to Baal Peor, they consecrated themselves to that shameful idol and became as vile as the thing they loved. 11 Ephraim's glory will fly away like a bird—no birth, no pregnancy, no conception. 12 Even if they rear children, I will bereave them of every one. Woe to them when I turn away from them! 13 I have seen Ephraim, like Tyre, planted in a pleasant place. But Ephraim will bring out their children to the slayer." 14 Give them, O LORD—what will you give them? Give them wombs that miscarry and breasts that are dry. 15 "Because of all their wickedness in Gilgal, I hated them there. **Because of their sinful deeds, I will drive them out of my house.** I will no longer love them; all their leaders are rebellious. 16 **Ephraim is blighted, their root is withered, they yield no fruit.** Even if they bear children, I will slay their cherished offspring.' 17 My God will reject them because they have not obeyed him;

We can clearly see here that the author of Mark uses Hosea 9 for his motif, because in Mark 11 the fig tree is in leaf but not in season, meaning that it was early in the growing season. Then Jesus goes to the temple to drive the people "out of his house". After that they return to the fig tree where they see that it was withered "from the root." This makes the parallel between Mark and Hosea 9 very clear, and shows that Hosea 9 was obviously the inspiration for all of these scenes. The author of Mark was also clearly making a reference to the meaning in the text of Hosea 9. Hosea 9 is talking about the destruction of Israel in no uncertain terms. The reader is supposed to make this connection and understand this as the meaning in the story.

But, let's look at how the writer of Matthew, the only other Gospel to include this scene, recorded this passage.

Matthew 21:

12 **Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there.** He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. 13 "It is written," he said to them, " 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.' "

14 The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant.

16 "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him.

"Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read," 'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?"

17 And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

18 **Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. 19 Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered.**

20 When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" they asked.

Here the entire scene is obviously changed around in such a way that it no longer mirrors the template from Hosea 9 and the references to being out of season are lost, as well as the reference to the root. The parallel with the Hosea 9 is pretty much lost here, so it would seem that the author of Matthew didn't recognize the parallel himself. It is also likely that the the author of Matthew thought that the original text of Mark seemed absurd, for why

would Jesus have expected to see fruit on a tree before the season in the first place? In Matthew the deeper symbolism is lost and this now looks like a recounting of some historical event instead of what it really is, which is a literary allusion. The author of Matthew also added additional details to a story that was clearly contrived in the first place, so we can see here the growing of legend.

In the Gospels of Luke and John we find the cleansing of the Temple scene alone, with no mention of the fig tree at all. It seems that those writers found the fig tree scene to simply be too confusion or seemingly nonsensical to include, but by eliminating the fig tree scene they further isolated the Temple scene, developing it more as a seemingly independent historical account.

Despite this, there are still many recognizable parallels between the Hebrew scriptures and all of the Gospel texts. Christians claim that the parallels between the Gospels and the "Old Testament" texts are due to the fact that all of the parallels are prophecies that Jesus was fulfilling, but close inspection of the references shows that many of them are not even prophecies and that few of them actually could relate to the Jesus story. Regardless, even if they did all relate to the story there is nothing to show that the story was not simply crafted from the existing scriptures at the time, and indeed, for reasons that will be further discussed, this is by far the most reasonable explanation for the story of Jesus. If I took a copy of the works of Nostradamus today I could sit down and write a story about a character who fulfills hundreds of "his prophecies". Would that make either his predictions or my story "true"? Of course not, but this isn't what the early Church fathers and Christian apologists thought, they viewed the correlations between the Hebrew scriptures (which they typically read in Greek translations) and the story of Jesus as "proof that the religion is true." One of the best examples of this comes from Eusebius of Caesarea, who wrote on this subject in the early 4th century in *The Proof of the Gospel*:

Grant then, dear friend, my request, and labor with rue henceforward in your prayers in my effort to present the Proof of the Gospel from the prophecies extant among the Hebrews from the earliest times. . . . I propose to show, by quotations from them, how they forestalled events that came to the light long ages after their time, the actual circumstances of the Saviour's own presentment of the Gospel. . . . It shall be my task to prove that they saw that which was not present as present, and that which as yet was not in existence as actually existing; and not only this, but that they foretold in writing the events of the future for posterity, so that by their help others can even now know what is coming. . . .

It seems now time to say what I consider to be desirable at present to draw from the prophetic writings for the proof of the Gospel. They said that Christ, [Whom they named] the Word of God, and Himself both God and Lord, and Angel of Great Counsel, would one day dwell among men, and would become for all the nations of the world, both Greek and Barbarian, a

teacher of true knowledge of God, and of such duty to God the Maker of the Universe, as the preaching of the Gospel includes. They said that He would become a little child, and would be called the Son of Man, as born of the race of Mankind. They foretold the wondrous fashion of His birth from a Virgin, and—strangest of all—they did not omit to name Bethlehem the place of His birth, which is to-day so famous that men still hasten from the ends of the earth to see it, but shouted it out with the greatest clearness. As if they stole a march on history these same writers proclaimed the very time of His appearance, the precise period of His sojourn on earth.

It is possible for you, if you care to take the trouble, to see with your eyes, comprehended in the prophetic writings, all the wonderful miracles of our Saviour Jesus Christ Himself, that are witnessed to by the heavenly Gospels, and to hear His divine and perfect teaching about true holiness. How it must move our wonder, when they unmistakably proclaim the new ideal of religion preached by Him to all men, the call of His disciples, and the teaching of the new Covenant. Yes, and in addition to all this they foretell the Jews' disbelief in Him, and disputing, the plots of the rulers, the envy of the Scribes, the treachery of one of His disciples, the schemes of enemies, the accusations of false witnesses, the condemnations of His judges, the shameful violence, unspeakable scourging, ill-omened abuse, and, crowning all, the death of shame. They portray Christ's wonderful silence, His gentleness and fortitude, and the unimaginable depths of His forbearance and forgiveness.

The most ancient Hebrew oracles present all these things definitely about One Who would come in the last times, and Who would undergo such sufferings among men, and they clearly tell the source of their foreknowledge. They bear witness to the Resurrection from the dead of the Being Whom they revealed, His appearance to His disciples, His gift of the Holy Spirit to them, His return to heaven, His establishment as King on His Father's throne and His glorious second Advent yet to be at the consummation of the age. In addition to all this you can hear the wailings and lamentations of each of the prophets, wailing and lamenting characteristically over the calamities which will overtake the Jewish people because of their impiety to Him Who had been foretold. How their kingdom, that had continued from the days of a remote ancestry to their own, would be utterly destroyed after their sin against Christ; how their fathers' Laws would be abrogated, they themselves deprived of their ancient worship, robbed of the independence of their forefathers, and made slaves of their enemies, instead of free men; how their royal metropolis would be burned with fire, their venerable and

holy altar undergo the flames and extreme desolation, their city be inhabited no longer by its old possessors but by races of other stock, while they would be dispersed among the Gentiles through the whole world, with never a hope of any cessation of evil, or breathing-space from troubles. And it is plain even to the blind, that what they saw and foretold is fulfilled in actual facts from the very day the Jews laid godless hands on Christ, and drew down on themselves the beginning of the train of sorrows.

- *THE PROOF OF THE GOSPEL*; Eusebius, 4th century

Amazingly, Eusebius didn't seem to consider the possibility that the reason there are so many parallels between the Gospels and the Hebrew scriptures is that the Gospel writers based their stories on the scriptures.

Prior to Eusebius, Justin Martyr also attributed the "truth" of the Gospels and the "truth" of Jesus Christ to the parallels between the Gospels and the earlier Hebrew scriptures, and he even went so far as to state that the Hebrews themselves were not the authors of their own scriptures, God was, and the Hebrews themselves couldn't understand their own scriptures, since they weren't the true authors, and that the prophecies for Jesus are not all straightforward or self-evident because God presented them in a variety of ways and embedded them in stories. Justin Martyr gave his fullest description of this in his work *First Apology*, written in the 2nd century. Sections read:

CHAPTER XXXVI -- DIFFERENT MODES OF PROPHECY.

But when you hear the utterances of the prophets spoken as it were personally, you must not suppose that they are spoken by the inspired themselves, but by the Divine Word who moves them. For sometimes He declares things that are to come to pass, in the manner of one who foretells the future; sometimes He speaks as from the person of God the Lord and Father of all; sometimes as from the person of Christ; sometimes as from the person of the people answering the Lord or His Father, just as you can see even in your own writers, one man being the writer of the whole, but introducing the persons who converse. And this the Jews who possessed the books of the prophets did not understand, and therefore did not recognize Christ even when He came, but even hate us who say that He has come, and who prove that, as was predicted, He was crucified by them.

Here Justin Martyr is basically justifying the fact that many of the parallels between the Gospels and the Hebrew scriptures are parts of other stories, songs, and things that by all accounts don't appear to be prophecies. Justin Martyr simply says that everything in the old scriptures is prophecy, thus there are "different modes" of prophecy in the scriptures.

CHAPTER XLII -- PROPHECY USING THE PAST TENSE.

But when the Spirit of prophecy speaks of things that are about to come to pass as if they had already taken place,--as may be observed even in the passages already cited by me,--that this circumstance may afford no excuse to readers [for misinterpreting them], we will make even this also quite plain. The things which He absolutely knows will take place, He predicts as if already they had taken place. And that the utterances must be thus received, you will perceive, if you give your attention to them. The words cited above, David uttered 1500 years before Christ became a man and was crucified; and no one of those who lived before Him, nor yet of His contemporaries, afforded joy to the Gentiles by being crucified. But our Jesus Christ, being crucified and dead, rose again, and having ascended to heaven, reigned; and by those things which were published in His name among all nations by the apostles, there is joy afforded to those who expect the immortality promised by Him.

Here Justin Martyr is specifically justifying parallels between the Gospels and the Hebrew scriptures where the parallels reference phrases that are written in the past tense, which are usually parts of other stories. He also talks about a "prediction of the crucifixion" by David, but there is a major problem here. What he is referring to is Psalm 22, where it says *"a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet."* The problem here is that the phrase *"they have pierced my hands and my feet"* is a mistranslation or interpolation, this is not a part of the scriptures in Hebrew, this is only found in later Greek translations of the text. Several different versions of this line have been found in different ancient texts, but none that read like the version in the Christian Bible. A common version of the line reads as follows: *"For dogs have surrounded me; a band of evildoers has encompassed me like a lion, my hands and feet."*

Even if the traditional Christian translation of this passage were correct, *"they have pierced my hands and my feet"* can apply to many things and it has been confirmed many times that the Roman's didn't actually crucify people by putting spikes through their hands because the hands couldn't support the weight. This passage is also the source for the portrayal of Jesus as crucified by putting spikes through his hands and the claim in Luke that Jesus proved he had been resurrected by showing the disciples the holes in his hands.

So what we can see is that from the very beginning scholars and theologians have been aware of many of the parallels between the story of Jesus and the Hebrew scriptures, and that early Christians, especially, believed that it was these parallels that proved that the religion was "true". Far from proving the "truth" of the religion, however, these parallels actually show us how the story of Jesus was crafted and demonstrate that the basis of the Jesus story is not reality, but scriptures.

Mistranslations

Some of the details of the life of Jesus are based on mistranslations of the Hebrew scriptures

All of the Gospels were written in Greek, and while the authors of the Gospels are unknown, we do know that they used a Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures called the Septuagint. The Septuagint was created by Jewish scribes who translated the Jewish texts into Greek because the Jewish community outside of Judea typically spoke Greek instead of Hebrew or Aramaic. Though the Septuagint was claimed to have been a "flawless" translation, it did in fact contain a number of errors. Some of these errors show up in the New Testament where the writers of the Gospels quote or reference mistranslated sections of the Septuagint. The most famous and critical of these errors occurs in *Isaiah 7*, which was referenced by Matthew as the basis for his famous virgin birth story.

A proper translation of Isaiah 7:10-17 from the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version), which is taken directly from the Hebrew, reads as follows:

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. Then Isaiah said: 'Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. **Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son**, and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted. The Lord will bring on you and on your people and on your ancestral house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria.'

Two errors were made when this passage was translated into Greek for the Septuagint. First "young woman" was translated to "virgin" and secondly the tense of the sentence was translated from present tense to future tense.

In the NIV (New International Version) the passage is translated as it was in the Greek Septuagint (and has traditionally been translated by Christians), and reads as follows:

10 Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, 11 "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights."

12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test."

13 Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it

not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: **The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son,** and will call him Immanuel. 15 He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. 16 But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. 17 The LORD will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—he will bring the king of Assyria."

The author of the Gospel called Matthew used this mistranslation as the basis for his story about Jesus' birth, stating:

Matthew 1:

20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 **"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son,** and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us."

A few interesting things about this is that, first of all, the author of Matthew continued to build on the mistranslation in the Septuagint, and secondly, the passage from Isaiah isn't a prophesy about anything expected to happen in the future, it was part of a self-contained story about Immanuel - there was no prophecy for "Jesus" to fulfill.

One reason that this mistranslation was probably made in the Septuagint, and retained in the Gospels and in Christian tradition, is that heroes were often fathered by the gods and born from virgins in Greek and Roman stories. Heroes were often called sons of gods in Greek and Roman stories, as well as being born from virgins, so this reading of the story fit perfectly well in that culture. This is also one reason why the story was rejected as fraudulent by more traditional Jews, who never attributed births to virgins.

Another example of a story element based on a misinterpretation of the scriptures, though not so much a translational issue, also comes from the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus is portrayed as triumphantly riding into town.

Matthew 21:

1 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you **will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me.** 3 If anyone says anything to you, tell him that

the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

5 "Say to the Daughter of Zion, '**See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**'"

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. 7 **They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them.** 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

Here the author of Matthew has misunderstood the meaning of this passage. In the Hebrew scripture it says "*on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*", but this doesn't mean two or three animals, it's just a further emphasis and further description of the one donkey.

The writer, however, has misunderstood this as talking about two different animals, a donkey and a colt, therefore, he has Jesus ride into town on two animals. The writer of the Gospel of John also included this scene, likely based on the Gospel of Matthew, but in the Gospel of John the author corrected this problem and had Jesus ride into town on only one animal.

The use of mistranslations is one thing that helps us to determine that the writers of the Gospels were using the Septuagint as their source, and along with the use of misinterpretations, also helps to show that the stories are crafted from scriptures, they are not observations of reality which happen to correlate to scriptures.

The Passover Lamb

Jesus' crucifixion on Passover defies historical believability, yet makes perfect sense metaphorically

According to the Gospels, Jesus was crucified on either the first day of Passover or the day before Passover, depending on the Gospel. The synoptics have Jesus crucified on the day of Passover, while John puts the crucifixion on the day before. This itself defies reason, as Passover is considered one of the holiest of Jewish holidays, and this holiday not only took considerable preparation, but was a time of forgiveness and celebration. It is also when the Jews made public sacrifices to their god. That the Jewish authorities would have held a public execution of someone at this time is itself pretty well beyond belief.

Not only this, but the arrest and (very short) trial of Jesus supposedly took place at night on Passover eve. That the Sanhedrin (the Jewish body of judges) would have assembled in the middle of the night on Passover eve to pass a quick judgment on anyone defies reason, but when you add to this the fact that in the story the members of the council slap Jesus and spit in his face the implausible borders on the impossible. To say that the Sanhedrin slapped and spit on someone in a trial is like saying that the justices of the Supreme Court would slap and spit on defendants. Yes, these were ancient times, but the institutions being talked about here were formal institutions that didn't just convene on a whim and they didn't act like savages, much less on Passover eve.

Here are rules that would have been in place for the Sanhedrin at the time, according to the Jewish Mishnah:

- 1) No criminal session was allowed at night.
- 2) No Sanhedrin trial could be heard at any place other than the Temple precincts.
- 3) No capital crime could be tried in a one-day sitting.
- 4) No criminal trial could be held on the eve of a Sabbath or festival.
- 5) No one could be found guilty on his own confession.
- 6) No blasphemy charge could be sustained unless the accused pronounced the name of God in front of witnesses.
- 7) The Sanhedrin were allowed to execute people on their own and did not need the Romans to do so for them.

The trial of Jesus according to the Gospels violated all of these rules.

So, the story of Jesus' arrest and execution seems quite implausible at the outset, but when one considers the symbolism of the story it becomes apparent that the basis for this story is theological, not historical.

On Passover, at the time that this story is supposedly taking place, the Jews provided many sacrifices, most of them as burnt offerings, meaning animals that were slaughtered and then burned on a fire. In addition to these sacrifices there was a special sacrifice of a lamb which was not burnt, but was instead eaten.

Josephus tells us of this tradition:

The feast of unleavened bread succeeds that of the Passover, and falls on the fifteenth day of the month, and continues seven days, wherein they feed on unleavened bread; on every one of which days two bulls are killed, and one ram, and seven lambs. Now these lambs are entirely burnt, besides the ewe lamb which is added to all the rest, for sins; for it is intended as a feast for the priest on every one of those days.

- *Antiquity of the Jews*, Josephus

This special lamb is a sacrifice specifically for the forgiveness of sins.

The crucifixion of Jesus on Passover is a metaphor for this sacrificial lamb. This symbolism was, perhaps, one of the earliest and most developed parts of Jesus Christ theology among the early followers of the Christ mythos among the Jews. The idea of Jesus Christ as a sacrificial lamb is first recorded in the letters of Paul from 1 Corinthians 5, where Paul associates immoral people with yeast and urges his correspondents to expel an immoral man from among their group:

1 Corinthians 5:

7 Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. **For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.** 8 Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.

1 Corinthians was probably written some time between 50 and 60 CE, and here we can see that the symbolism of Christ as a sacrificial Passover lamb was a part of the Christian tradition prior to the writing of the Gospels.

The *Book of Hebrews* describes Christ as an ultimate sacrifice that makes the need for all other sacrifices obsolete:

Hebrews 9:

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. **He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!**

For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant,

that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. He said, "This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep." In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. **In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.**

It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. **Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.**

...

Hebrews 10:

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. **But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.**

The *Book of Hebrews* was probably written before the Gospel of Mark was written, but this is not certain. The *Book of Hebrews*, like the letters of Paul, gives no details about a life of Jesus, it only talks about Christ in a metaphorical sense, with all of the descriptions of Christ coming from the Hebrew scriptures. The author of Mark may or may not have been aware of the *Book of Hebrews*, but one can presume that the author of Mark was aware of the same symbolism that is discussed above, because this symbolism is a part of

his story as well in a more subtle way.

None of the three synoptic Gospels makes an explicit reference to Christ as the Passover lamb, but the Gospel called John does. The writer of John refers to Jesus as the "Lamb of God" and gives the following narrative of his crucifixion and death:

John 19:

28 After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' 29 A jar full of sour wine was standing there. **So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth.** 30 When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

31 Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. 32 Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. 33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. 35 (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and there is one who knows that he tells the truth.) 36 **These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'None of his bones shall be broken.'** 37 And again another passage of scripture says, 'They will look on the one whom they have pierced.'

They keys here are the references to the breaking of bones and the hyssop. The breaking of bones refers to Numbers 9, as well as Psalm 34. Numbers 9 states:

Numbers 9:

11 In the second month on the fourteenth day, at twilight, they shall keep it; they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 12 They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break a bone of it; according to all the statute for the passover they shall keep it.

The author of John is specifically drawing on this passage to craft his story, thus the author of John has Jesus crucified on the 14th day of Nisan, whereas he is crucified on the 15th day of Nisan in the synoptics. The difference in days here is because the lambs are sacrificed on the 14th day of Nisan. The point here, though, is that the author of John is explicitly drawing a reference to Jesus as the Passover lamb. The author of John makes-up the scenario here of having the other individuals' legs broken (and having Jesus stabbed in the side) in order to make references to the scriptures.

The hyssop refers to Exodus 12, which states:

Exodus 12:

21 Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, 'Go, select lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover lamb. 22 Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin.

Though the synoptics do not directly refer to Jesus as the Passover lamb, the symbolism is still very clear.

There are other symbolic elements to the crucifixion story as well. For example, the timing of events in Mark is in triplets. In the Gospel of Mark the crucifixion starts on the "3rd hour" (which is 9:00 am our time), darkness covers the land on the "6th hour" (12 noon our time), and Jesus dies on the "9th hour" (3 pm our time).

The crucifixion scenes in the Gospels are so utterly symbolic and based on the scriptures that as history they are unbelievable. The events of the arrest, trial, and execution defy our knowledge of Jewish law of the time. On the eve of, or during, Passover these are things that they simply did not do. There is also considerable doubt that the Jews would have had any reason to go to the Romans to carry out the execution, or that they would have had him crucified, since the law required death by stoning for blasphemy, which is what Jesus was supposedly charged with. However, "Christ crucified" was already a theme in the teachings of Paul, and as a crossover story for an audience of both Jews and "Gentiles" the inclusion of the Romanesque scenes make sense.

The Gospels vs. History

The Gospels make many claims that are contradicted by the historical record

Unlike the writings of the Old Testament, which cover a time span of hundreds, if not thousands, of years, the writings of the New Testament cover a very brief period of time. Most of the books, as well, don't make any significant historical statements that could even be checked against the historical record, but the Gospels and the book of Acts do make some.

Of primary importance, however, are the Gospels. Though the Gospels only cover a short time-span, there are a few claims which are made that can be checked against the known historical record. It must be noted that the Gospels do, of course, get some history correct. Herod was a real king, Pontius Pilate was a real governor of Judea, and Galilee was a real place, but beyond the basics several of the details that are part of the Gospel stories are either completely without evidence or are contradicted by the evidence that we do have. Here are a few examples of claims that are made in the Gospels which are either contradicted by the historical record or are unconfirmed outside of the Gospels.

- "Star of Bethlehem" - No record of such a celestial event outside the Gospel of Matthew.
- Roman census in Jesus birth story – No record of any census that matches this description.
- "Massacre of the Innocents" - No record of this event outside the Gospel of Matthew.
- John the Baptist – Killed early in the Gospels, died in 36 CE according to Josephus.
- Death of Jesus – Accompanied by blackout of sun, earthquakes, and raising of the dead in the Gospels, no record of this by others.

The Star of Bethlehem

There is perhaps no event in the Gospels that has been surrounded by more speculation and attempts at explanation than the "Star of Bethlehem". Yet, with almost 2,000 years of attempts at explanation, no legitimate historical explanation has ever come forward. Many people have claimed that they have figured out what the Star of Bethlehem is, and hundreds of books have been published on the subject, yet when it comes down to it scholars still acknowledge that there is nothing in the historical record that verifies any celestial event that can be correlated to the "Star of Bethlehem".

There are only two accounts of the birth of Jesus in the Gospels, one in Matthew and one in Luke. There is nothing in either of these accounts that allows us to positively date the year in which the stories are supposedly taking place. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke state that King Herod the Great is alive and near the end of his reign during the events of their account, so we know that these accounts have to be set shortly before he died. The

death of King Herod is pretty strongly dated to 4 BCE. Bible scholars today generally agree that some time between 6 and 4 BCE is when Jesus was born according to what can be inferred from the Gospel account of Matthew.

From the early days of Christianity, however, people believed that the Gospel of Matthew was the first Gospel written, but we know today that the Gospel of Mark was the first Gospel written, and that the authors of both Matthew and Luke copied from Mark and added on two separate birth stories for Jesus, both of which disagree with each other and have almost nothing in common. Not only this, but the Gospel of Mark contains elements which imply that Jesus had a natural normal family and the author of Mark says nothing about a special birth. Could the first person who wrote a narrative about Jesus, who serves as the primary source for both Matthew and Luke, not have known about Jesus' special birth? If he did know about it, why didn't he say anything about it? Why does the Gospel of John also completely avoid any birth narrative and simply say that *"the Word was made flesh"*?

In addition to these issues consider this problem: How are the writers of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke supposed to have gotten the details of their stories? Who witnessed these events? Was the author of Matthew riding along with the Magi? Was he at Herod's palace listening in on his conversations?

This problem has long been recognized by Christians, which is why early apologists said that the writers of the Gospels got their information from divine revelation, so now we are reduced back to miracles to account for how these accounts even came down to us, because, of course, there is no natural explanation for how these events could have been recorded by the writers of the Gospels.

The "Star of Bethlehem" is only mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew; it isn't mentioned in Luke or any other book in the Bible. Here is exactly what the Gospel of Matthew says:

Matthew 2:

1 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? **For we observed his star at its rising in the east,** and have come to pay him homage.' 3 When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; 4 and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

6 "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to rule my people Israel." '

7 **Then Herod secretly called for the magi and learned from**

them the exact time when the star had appeared. 8 Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' 9 **When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising in the east, until it stopped over the place where the child was.** 10 **When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.** 11 On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

At least one story element here is clearly drawn from the Hebrew scriptures, the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Jesus is said to have been born in Bethlehem because the scriptures said that a ruler would come from Bethlehem. But we also know that the Gospel writers, especially Mark and Matthew, not only made explicit references to scriptures, but also implicit references as well.

There is only one reference to a star as a sign in the Old Testament and this is in the book of Numbers. This reference to a star is part of a supposed prophesy by Balaam, who was not a Jew, but who foretold good things for the Jewish people. It's not certain that the writer of Matthew was referring to this passage, but even if not it demonstrates the ideas that surrounded stars as oracles in the ancient world, in a context that the writer of Matthew would have been familiar with. In truth these types of oracles were quite common during this time.

Numbers 24:
17 I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near—
a star shall come out of Jacob,
and a scepter shall rise out of Israel;

Since the magi were presumably not Jewish, this could well be a way that the writer of Matthew was tying into this non-Jewish oracle in the Hebrew scriptures, and it fits the typical pattern of the types of references that the writer of Matthew made. Most likely, this scripture is the source of the "Star of Bethlehem", not any ancient observation of a real phenomenon. The author had just made an explicit reference to Micah 5:2 regarding Bethlehem and a coming ruler and this passage also refers to a star and a coming ruler, indicated by the scepter. The gifts of frankincense and myrrh are also references to Old Testament passages, as is the "flight to Egypt" that follows this scene.

The supposed star in the passage in Matthew is apparently traveling and stopping over a location, things which hardly seem realistic and can hardly be correlated to comets, supernova, or even planetary alignments, as various people have suggested. In the story

the magi said that they knew the child was born in Bethlehem because of a prophecy, so they didn't need a star to direct them to the town, this star directed them precisely to the house of the child.

The fact is that we do have significant astronomical records from various groups of people that cover this time-span and none of these people record anything that could resemble the "Star of Bethlehem". We have records from the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Jews, and the Chinese for starters, and many celestial events were even recorded by different groups in the Americas, Australia, and Africa, as well as various other tribes throughout Europe and Asia. In all this data nobody records anything resembling this star and nobody else in the Bible even mentions it. The closest possible record that could be correlated to this star is a small nova event that was recorded by the Chinese in 5 BCE, but they state that the light was faint and hardly noticeable. Novas are not seen differently from different locations, so it wouldn't have been any more noticeable around Bethlehem, and if it was then we would expect someone else from the region to have recorded it.

As with so many things in the Gospels, the "Star of Bethlehem" is best explained as a fictional story element that was crafted to correlate to the Hebrew scriptures.

Roman census in Jesus birth story

While the Gospel of Matthew makes the only mention of the "Star of Bethlehem", the Gospel of Luke makes the only mention of a census of the whole Roman "world". The Gospel of Luke states:

Luke 2:

1 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered. 4 Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The first issue here is that Quirinius definitely was not even governor of Syria during the reign of King Herod, so the possibility that Jesus was born while Herod was king and also during the governorship of Quirinius is completely impossible.

The second issue is that there was a census taken under the rule of Quirinius, but it was nothing like the one described in Luke, and it took place in 6 CE, some 9 or 10 years after the death of Herod.

The third issue is that no census has ever been recorded that resembles the one described by Luke.

The important thing to note in all of this is that we do have records from this time that do describe Roman censuses and the Jewish historian Josephus recorded the census of Quirinius. According to Luke the census required everyone, or at least males, to go to the town of their ancestors. The problem here should be apparent. Which ancestors? Joseph went to Bethlehem because this is where David was from, but David lived over a thousand year prior supposedly, so Joseph went to where his great, great, great, etc., grandfather was from?

Not only does this not make sense, but no census would demand that anyone go to a place of their ancestry, that would defeat the whole purpose of a census.

Indeed, even Christian scholars recognize that there is no confirmation of this census, and that it in fact raises major contradictions. *The Harper Collins New Revised Standard Edition Study Bible* states in relation to this census:

Luke 2.1: A general decree of this sort is not otherwise attested.

Luke 2.2: ... According to Josephus, Quirinius became governor of Syria only in 6 CE, while Luke's story is still set in the time of Herod the Great, who died in 4 BCE.

This is a major irreconcilable contradiction, but how did this problem arise? Well, there is growing evidence that the writer of Luke used the writings of Josephus as a source for his Gospel, indeed the evidence for this is now quite strong and is accepted by some scholars. The source material for Luke, then, is probably the Gospel of Mark, "Q", Josephus, and perhaps the letters of Paul. These four sources can account for pretty much every detail of the material in Luke, and this would explain why the writer of Luke, probably writing some time in the early 2nd century, would make this mistake. This was old history by the time that the author of Luke got around to writing his story and he didn't have anything but other writings to go by and presumably didn't realize that Quirinius was governor after Herod had died.

Josephus talks about the census during the reign of Quirinius as an introduction to events that befell the Jews, and thus Luke probably read Josephus and picked-up on this theme and used it for his story about the birth of Jesus as well.

Massacre of the Innocents

According to the Gospel of Matthew, King Herod ordered all of the male children two or younger around the town of Bethlehem to be killed when he learned of the birth of Jesus. As with the Star of Bethlehem, the author of Matthew is the only person in all of ancient literature to record this supposed event. The Gospel of Matthew states:

Matthew 2:

16 When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the magi.

17 Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

18 'A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.'

We can see here that the author of Matthew explicitly references Jeremiah 31:15, but he also implicitly makes reference to the Exodus story about the birth of Moses. In the story of Moses the Pharaoh says that the Israelites are increasing in number too rapidly, so he requests that midwives kill the boys who are born. They decline to do so, so the Pharaoh orders all of the boys to be killed.

Exodus 1:

22 Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live."

According to the story a Levite women then placed her son into a basket and put him into the Nile, where he was found by an Egyptian woman and raised. This boy was Moses.

In the typical fashion of Matthew, the event draws multiple parallels to the older scriptures, crafting a story that draws on familiar themes in the Hebrew stories, but changing them to create a new narrative.

That King Herod would have had hundreds or thousands of infants killed in Bethlehem without anyone recording the event aside from the author of Matthew is well beyond our expectation of history. Josephus provided a very detailed account of the reign of King Herod, even listing the bad things that he did. Other writers also gave accounts of the rule of King Herod and yet neither Josephus nor anyone else recorded anything about a mass slaughter of infants, something that surely would have been worthy of note. There is also no archaeological evidence to support this event either.

Once again, the best explanation for this event is that the author of Matthew is writing fiction based on the Old Testament, he isn't writing history.

John the Baptist

The death of John the Baptist is described in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. The Gospel of Matthew basically copies its story from the *Gospel of Mark*, but truncates it slightly. In both cases John the Baptist is killed by Herod fairly early in the story, and of course before the death of Jesus.

Mark 6:

17 For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married.

18 For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19 So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, 20 because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.

21 Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. 22 When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests.

The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you." 23 And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom."

24 She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?"

"The head of John the Baptist," she answered.

25 At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

26 The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. 27 So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, 28 and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. 29 On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Not only do these Gospels make it clear that John the Baptist is killed before Jesus, but they describe the killing of John the Baptist as being related to a dinner party transgression and say that John the Baptist was beheaded.

The Jewish historian Josephus, however, also records the death of John the Baptist, and not only is his account different, but the timing of his death is different as well. According to the account given by Josephus (the only other account of his death outside the Bible), John the Baptist would have died in 36 CE.

1. ... So Aretas made this the first occasion of his enmity between him and Herod, who had also some quarrel with him about their limits at the country of Gamalitis. So they raised armies on both sides, and prepared for war, and sent their generals to fight instead of themselves; and when they had joined battle, all Herod's army was destroyed by the

treachery of some fugitives, who, though they were of the tetrarchy of Philip, joined with Aretas's army.. So Herod wrote about these affairs to Tiberius, who being very angry at the attempt made by Aretas, wrote to Vitellius to make war upon him, and either to take him alive, and bring him to him in bonds, or to kill him, and send him his head. This was the charge that Tiberius gave to the president of Syria.

2. Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist: for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; for that the washing [with water] would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away [or the remission] of some sins [only], but for the purification of the body; supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness. Now when [many] others came in crowds about him, for they were very greatly moved [or pleased] by hearing his words, **Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion, (for they seemed ready to do any thing he should advise,) thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause,** and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it would be too late. Accordingly he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Macherus, the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death. Now the Jews had an opinion that the destruction of this army was sent as a punishment upon Herod, and a mark of God's displeasure to him.

The war between Herod and Aretas took place in 36 CE and thus Josephus' mention of the Jews blaming Herod's defeat by Aretas on his killing of John the Baptist implies that Herod had John the Baptist killed some time within a year or so of the war. This means that John the Baptist was probably killed in 35 or 36 CE, some 2 or 3 years after the latest proposed date for the death of Jesus based on the Gospels. Pilate's last year as governor of Judea was also 36 CE.

The apologetic criticism of this dating of John the Baptist's death is that we can't be certain how recent the death of John the Baptist really was. They claim that perhaps John the Baptist was killed 4 or 5 years earlier, but the public still associated his death with the bad fortunes of Herod. While this is possible, it is unlikely, and it does nothing to address the contradictions in the reasoning provided for the killing of John the Baptist.

The Gospel account of the killing of John the Baptist by Herod portrays the reason for his execution as a moral failure of Herod. Conniving women use guile and sexuality to bring

about the killing of a holy man. Once again we see in the Bible women being responsible for the downfall of a great man, recalling the themes of Genesis and so many other Biblical stories where women are the villains and men fall from grace by being seduced or deceived by women.

The account given by Josephus makes much more sense and is much more typical of the real reasons why such actions took place in the ancient world. John the Baptist, Josephus states, was seen as a political threat by Herod so Herod had him killed.

It's interesting that the Gospels don't give this as the reason for the death of John the Baptist, because in the Gospels it is Jesus who is killed for being the supposed political threat. The death of John the Baptist is a moralistic side element in the Gospels, used to dispose of John the Baptist (Elijah) once he is no longer relevant to the story, but in such a way that does not make him a martyr for a cause, which, in reality, he was. John the Baptist was the real martyr but if he were martyred in the Gospels that would only draw attention away from the "ultimate sacrifice" of the main character Jesus.

Death of Jesus

The Gospels provide us with four accounts of the death of Jesus. Of these accounts only the three synoptic accounts, all based on the Gospel of Mark, provide us with claims that we could reasonably expect to be able to verify against the historical record. The one major claim that is repeated in all three synoptic accounts is the darkening of the sun from noon to 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The Gospel of Matthew also makes two other claims that we should expect to be able to verify via the historical record, the claims that there was an earthquake when Jesus died and that many dead people were brought back to life, rose up from their graves, and went into the cities to tell people about Jesus.

If any of these three things happened, the darkening of the sun, an earthquake, or the raising of the dead, it's reasonable to expect that other people would have also documented these events.

Let's see exactly what the four Gospels state:

Mark 15:

33 **At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour.** 34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

35 When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah."

36 One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said.

37 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the son of God!"

40 Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. 41 In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

Matthew 27:

45 **From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land.** 46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

47 When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."

48 Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. 49 The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. **The earth shook and the rocks split.** 52 **The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.** 53 **They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.**

54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

55 Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. 56 Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

Luke 23:

44 **It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour,** 45 **for the sun stopped shining.** And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

47 The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." 48 When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. 49 But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

John 19:

28 Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

31 Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. 32 The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. 33 But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. 35 The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. 36 These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," 37 and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."

As has already been discussed, each of these accounts is based heavily on the Hebrew scriptures. Virtually every event in each of these accounts alludes back to the earlier scriptures, and this is the case for each of the three potentially verifiable claims that we find in the synoptics. First let's look at the scriptural basis for each of these claims.

1) Darkness over the land:

The Gospel accounts all state that darkness came over the land from the sixth hour until the ninth hour. The sixth hour, according to how they told time, was noon and the ninth hour was 3 o'clock pm. We find the scriptural basis for this story element in Amos 8:

Amos 8:

9 "In that day," declares the Sovereign LORD, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.

The book of Amos talks about how God will destroy Israel because its people have forsaken the poor and are no longer holy. It talks about various things that will happen on the day that God decides to destroy Israel, and then goes on to say that after God has destroyed Israel he will restore Israel through "*David's fallen tent*".

2) The earth shook:

Only the Gospel of Matthew mentions an earthquake that accompanied the death of Jesus, but the scriptural source for this claim comes from the same place as the darkness claim, Amos 8:

Amos 8:

8 Will not the land tremble for this, and all who live in it mourn? The whole land will rise like the Nile; it will be stirred up and then sink like the river of Egypt."

3) The dead rise:

The only place where the rising of the dead upon the death of Jesus is mentioned is also in the Gospel of Matthew. As with the other claims, this claim also has a scriptural basis, Ezekiel 37:

Ezekiel 37:

12 Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. 14 I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.' "

Of course there are no records from anyone else that document a day when dead people rose from their graves and began going into the cities. It is reasonable to expect, however, that if this really happened someone else would have written about it. Instead, this claim is made by only one person, the author of Matthew, and we can see that there is a scriptural basis for this story element.

The issues of the darkening of the sun and an earthquake are more complex however. We have no clear primary source attestations to either a darkening of the sun or an earthquake anywhere around the time that Jesus supposedly died, between about 27 and 33 CE. There are, however, some claims made by Christian apologists that records of these two events were made by non-Christians.

We have second and third hand passages that report to record statements made by non-Christians regarding a darkening of the sun and earthquakes. The first of these comes to us from a 9th century monk who quotes the 3rd century Christian chronicler Julius Africanus, who comments on statements attributed to Thallus and Phlegon. None of the quoted works

by Thallus or Phlegon remain, nor does the work by Julius Africanus that presumably makes these references.

Here is what George Syncellus, the 9th century monk, records Africanus as having said:

This event followed each of his deeds, and healings of body and soul, and knowledge of hidden things, and his resurrection from the dead, all sufficiently proven to the disciples before us and to his apostles: **after the most dreadful darkness fell over the whole world, the rocks were torn apart by an earthquake and much of Judaea and the rest of the land was torn down. Thallus calls this darkness an eclipse of the sun in the third book of his Histories, without reason it seems to me. For...how are we to believe that an eclipse happened when the moon was diametrically opposite the sun?** In fact, let it be so. Let the idea that this happened seize and carry away the multitude, and let the cosmic prodigy be counted as an eclipse of the sun according to its appearance. **Phlegon reports that in the time of Tiberius Caesar, during the full moon, a full eclipse of the sun happened, from the sixth hour until the ninth. Clearly this is our eclipse!** What is common about an earthquake, an eclipse, rocks torn apart, a rising of the dead, and such a huge cosmic movement? At the very least, over a long period, no conjunction this great is remembered. But it was a godsent darkness, because the Lord happened to suffer, and the Bible, in Daniel, supports that seventy spans of seven years would come together up to this time.

Here we see that Julius Africanus claims that the darkening of the sun covered the "whole world". This is an added belief of his own that isn't specified in the Gospels, and, of course, he would have no way to know if this even happened. This claim fits the typical early Christian pattern of exaggerating and making-up claims to suit their whims. Africanus also claims that there was an earthquake and that much of Judea was "torn down". No one else reports this and there is no evidence of an earthquake in Judea at this time. This, again, is just another made-up claim by Africanus. Then Africanus refers to the external source Thallus, where he says that Thallus claims that "this darkness" was an eclipse of the sun. We don't actually have any idea of what Thallus actually wrote, because we don't have a copy of this work, nor do we have a quotation of this part of this supposed work by anyone else. All that we have here is a claim by Africanus, who just told two tall tales, that Thallus said something about an eclipse. We don't know if Thallus just reported an eclipse that Africanus is himself associating with the death of Jesus, if Thallus made a comment himself about Jesus, or really anything else at all, because we don't have any more information. We do, however, know that there was supposedly a history written by a Thallus that covered the time from the Trojan War to the 167th Olympiad, which equates to 109 BCE, over 100 years before the supposed death of Jesus, so this book hardly seems

like a potential source of confirmation for this event. Other than this small amount of information, we aren't really sure what Africanus is talking about here and have no way to even see the context of what this supposed Thallus was saying.

Africanus goes on to state that it is not reasonable to call the darkness during the death of Jesus an eclipse, because Jesus was supposedly killed on a Passover in which there was a full moon (because Passover was moved to a specific date, not all Passovers are during full moons). Solar eclipses cannot happen during a full moon, so this makes an eclipse physically impossible, but Africanus goes on to claim that someone called Phlegon recorded an eclipse that took place during a full moon, lasted three hours, and started at noon during the reign of Tiberius.

Both Origen and Eusebius also apparently referenced Phlegon as a corroborator of the events that occurred after the death of Jesus. Eusebius' account of what Phlegon wrote also comes down to us from only George Syncellus, where he quotes Eusebius as having written:

Jesus Christ..underwent his passion in the 18th year of Tiberius [32 AD]. Also at that time in another Greek compendium we find an event recorded in these words: **"the sun was eclipsed, Bithynia was struck by an earthquake, and in the city of Nicaea many buildings fell."** All these things happened to occur during the Lord's passion. In fact, Phlegon, too, a distinguished reckoner of Olympiads, wrote more on these events in his 13th book, saying this: **"Now, in the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad [32 AD], a great eclipse of the sun occurred at the sixth hour [noon] that excelled every other before it, turning the day into such darkness of night that the stars could be seen in heaven, and the earth moved in Bithynia, toppling many buildings in the city of Nicaea."**

In this case we see that Eusebius apparently quoted Phlegon instead of paraphrasing him, and in this case there is no mention of a full moon, but rather there is mention of an earthquake.

Eusebius goes on to quote Phlegon stating that the eclipse lasted for three hours and started at noon, and that the eclipse was so dark that you could see the stars.

Here are the issues with all this. Firstly, we don't actually have the works of Phlegon to confirm anything that he did write, but secondly, Phlegon was writing in the second century and we know that his works were not of an accurate historical nature, but rather he was like a tabloid writer who wrote sensational things about supernatural events. The two surviving works of Phlegon are *Book of Marvels* and *On Long-lived Persons*.

William Hansen, who provided the first English translation of Phlegon's *Book of Marvels*, noted that the work was perhaps, *"the earliest surviving work of pure sensationalism in Western literature,"* and that Phlegon sought out, *"written and oral sources for items of*

sensationalistic import."

The fragments of Phlegon's historical works that survive have led scholars to regard him as one of the least reliable and more outrageous writers of his time. A review of Hansen's translation and commentary on Phlegon notes the following:

Phlegon's untypicality lies in the sensational quality of his material. Other paradoxographers maintained at least a pretence of purveying "scientific" information, generally relating to the physical world. Phlegon on the other hand gives us a superb ghost-story, evinces an interest in side-show freaks and includes other "facts" (like a thousand-year old Sibyl or items drawn from mythology) which fall outside even the most elastic definitions of plausibility.

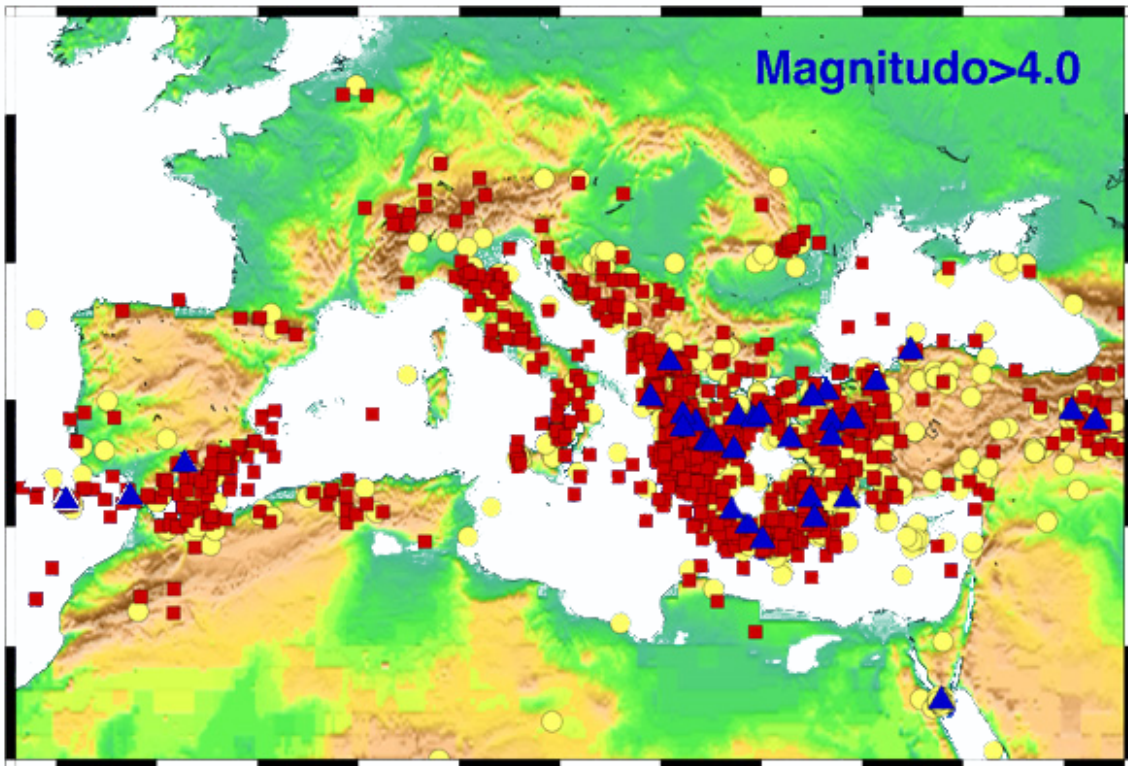
- Review of Phlegon of Tralles' Book of Marvels; J.R. Morgan, University of Exeter Press, 1996

So, the great source of confirmation for the events following the death of Jesus is a second century writer, who wrote after the Gospels had been published, who collected bizarre tales from around the empire and collated them into even more fantastic stories. Obviously this isn't the type of confirmation that one would look for in an ancient source, but there are more problems here than just this. Phlegon talks about events that supposedly took place in Bithynia, an area in what is now northern Turkey. Even if an earthquake and eclipse really did happen there, such an earthquake couldn't have been felt in Jerusalem, unless it was the largest earthquake ever known, and if it was then not only should we expect someone else to have written about it but we would also expect to have archaeological evidence of it as well. The following map, which incidentally also shows the supposed travel path of Paul, has Bithynia circled, which you can see is quite a long distance from Jerusalem, over 500 miles in fact.



Actually, earthquakes were, and are, so common in the this region that even if there were records of earthquakes that occurred some time between 27 and 33 CE in this area it would not be a surprise, but alas the closest thing that we can find is this one reference by Phlegon of a supposed earthquake that occurred in Bithynia.

The map below shows earthquakes over 4.0 on the Richter Scale recorded in the Mediterranean region between 1964 and 1992. As you can see, earthquakes are extremely common around Greece and Turkey, but not so common in the area of Israel. Even if Phlegon's account has some basis in fact, he is only talking about an earthquake in Bithynia, not Judea, and earthquakes in this region are quite common.



As for the "eclipse", Phlegon's statements are physically impossible. A solar eclipse can only last about seven minutes, not hours, and they are only visible from specific areas, they can't be seen from multiple places in the world when they occur, you have to be at the right place at the right time. If a solar eclipse did take place at Bithynia, it wouldn't have been visible in Judea. This could mean that what Phlegon recorded wasn't an eclipse, but rather the supernatural power of God blacking out the sun, but if this is the case then why does the only confirmation of this come from one person who is a known writer of tall tales, some time after the Gospels have already been in circulation?

All in all, we have three major events that we should expect to be able to confirm by the historical record: A blackout of the sun, an earthquake, and mass raising of the dead. None of these things are confirmed by the historical record, despite Christian apologists clearly

making efforts to search for sources of confirmation. As with the other Gospel claims that we have discussed, there are clear scriptural sources for these claims, and the most reasonable explanation for why these claims were made in the Gospels is that the writers of the Gospels based their stories on the Hebrew scriptures, not reality.

This is significant because it strengthens the challenge to the historicity of all of the other passages in the Gospels that are based on scriptures. Even in cases where events in the Gospels can be shown to have a scriptural basis, some Christians claim that a scriptural basis does not preclude an additional historic basis. Since many of the events in the Gospels are historically unverifiable this is difficult to counter, but what this demonstrates is that for each event in the Gospels that has both a scriptural basis and is reasonably historically verifiable, the historical evidence goes against the Gospels. Since every potentially verifiable story element in the Gospels that is based on scriptures is not confirmed by the historical evidence, a strong case is made that events in the Bible that have a scriptural basis do not have a corresponding historical basis, thus the burden of proof is on those proposing that such events are historical.

James, not the brother of Jesus

Contrary to Christian tradition, Christian writings show that James the prominent church leader cannot be the brother of Jesus, and indeed he may have been "the beloved disciple"

Christian tradition holds that Jesus' "brother" James (presumably his step-brother among Catholics) became a leader of the Christian community after Jesus' death and came to be known as "James the Just". This is actually a very big issue in the Christian faith, as James the Just is a major figure in the "post-Jesus" era and had many later stories and legends written about him. That this James is the brother of Jesus is highly important to many Church traditions and beliefs, and it's also very important for tying Jesus into history, but was the James who was an important figure in the early Christian community really a literal brother of Jesus?

Presumably the earliest mention of a James who is a leader in the Christian community is found in the letters of Paul, and it is a passage in Paul's letter to the Galatians that much of the tradition rests on.

Galatians 1:

11 I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. 12 I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

13 For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. 14 I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. 15 But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.

18 Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. 20 I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie.

This seems pretty cut a dry, Paul says that he met James, who was "the Lord's brother", and we know that Paul called Jesus "the Lord", so this must mean that Paul met the literal brother of Jesus, right? Not so fast.

Many people, including Earl Doherty and Arthur Drews, have pointed out that the term brother or brothers was regularly applied to apostles and members of the church in general and conclude that this is how it was being used here as well.

The 500 brothers mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15, as well as "brothers" mentioned in 1 Corinthians 9, are examples that are often cited to show Paul's use of brothers of the Lord in ways that clearly don't mean literal relatives.

1 Corinthians 9:

5 Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do **the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord** and Peter?

Some people even try to argue that this mention of brothers in 1 Corinthians 9 means relatives, but this really wouldn't make sense, for why would literal brothers of Jesus even be a part of this issue, especially since in later accounts where literal brothers of Jesus are discussed they have nothing to do with him or his movement. Indeed Jesus' family is portrayed as being rejected by him in the Gospels.

There is also a similar usage of brothers in Philippians.

Philippians 1:

12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 Because of my chains, **most of the brothers in the Lord** have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

The issues go well beyond this, however. Who is James and what role does James play? Paul goes on to tell us in Galatians that James is considered one of the pillars of the Christian community.

Galatians 2:

9 James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews.

So, here we have James, Peter, and John, who are reputed in Paul's time to be the most important members of the movement. What other sources tell us about these key figures? What other sources would lead us to think that Jesus had a brother named James and that his brother is an important figure in the Christian community? Actually, none of the other early Christian sources would lead us to this conclusion, and indeed they all lead to a different conclusion.

There are only two Gospels that name the supposed brothers of Jesus, the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Matthew, which simply copies from Mark. The Gospel of Mark only mentions literal brothers of Jesus one time, and then they disappear from the narrative.

Mark 6:

1 Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. 2 When the Sabbath came, he began to

teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.

"Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! 3 Isn't this the carpenter? **Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon?** Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

4 Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor." 5 He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. 6 And he was amazed at their lack of faith.

This is where the author of Mark introduces Jesus' family, and they are never mentioned again in the Gospel after that, not even his mother Mary. Indeed Jesus totally rejects his family in the Gospel of Mark.

Mark does make many mentions of an important James though, and that is James son of Zebedee, who is counted among the disciples of Jesus. In fact, James son of Zebedee is among the very first disciples that are introduced in the Gospel of Mark.

Mark 1:

16 As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 17 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." 18 At once they left their nets and followed him.

19 **When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John** in a boat, preparing their nets. 20 Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

First we are introduced to Simon, who is renamed Peter, and then we have James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Throughout the Gospel of Mark and the other synoptic Gospels, Peter, James, and John are the most important disciples, who go everywhere with Jesus.

Mark 5:

36 Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, "Don't be afraid; just believe."

37 **He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James.** 38 When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. 39 He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is

not dead but asleep." 40 But they laughed at him.

These are the three disciples that are with Jesus at the Transfiguration.

Mark 9:

2 After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. 3 His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. 4 And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

The Gospel of Mark also tells of discontent among the apostles towards James and his brother John.

Mark 10:

35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

36 "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

37 They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

38 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

39 "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 40 but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

41 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.

If we take the Gospel of Mark as an allegorical fiction, then of course none of these things really happened. Instead, this is most likely a setup by the author for the later event of the crucifixion, where the author places criminals at the left and right hand of Jesus. This is similar to the setup where Simon Peter rebukes Jesus and Jesus proclaims that his followers should *"take up their cross and follow me,"* while later in the story a stranger named Simon from Cyrene is the one who carries his cross.

Nevertheless, Peter, John, and James are presumably real people that were mentioned by Paul several times. The Gospel of Mark is built on some tradition, and may indeed be built on Pauline tradition, which would explain why the other apostles are poorly portrayed in the Gospel of Mark. The Gospel of Mark is a story with meaning that does reflect traditions and does talk about the real Christian community. Peter, James, and John probably were real people, who really went by those names, and who really were Christian apostles and community leaders. Much of what we are told about them in Christian

sources, however, is probably just legend, but they probably were real people and this Gospel probably does reflect real relationships among the apostles.

It would not make sense for the writer of Mark to spend so much effort building up the character of James son of Zebedee if this person were not a pillar of the Christian community. In all of the synoptic Gospels, James, John, and Peter are the three main disciples, and Paul tells us that the three main people considered to be pillars of the Christian community during his time were James, John, and Peter as well, but Christian tradition holds that the James that Paul was talking about was the literal brother of Jesus. Given that the Gospels were all written after the works of Paul, and that the Gospels serve as a backdrop for the Christian movement, and that the Gospels establish the positions of the major Christian leaders, it would not make any sense for the Gospels to totally ignore James the literal brother of Jesus while playing up this other James son of Zebedee who is an apostle, if James the brother of Jesus is who became a leader of the Christian community.

There is much more to this case however. The Gospels make it clear that James son of Zebedee is the partner of Peter.

Luke 5:

8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" 9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 10 **and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.**

It is important to note that the author of the Gospel of Luke *never* names any siblings of Jesus. He mentions brothers of Jesus one time but the names of the brothers are omitted.

Luke 8:

19 Now Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. 20 Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you."

21 He replied, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice."

In the Gospel of Luke the rejection of Jesus' family is absolute, the author doesn't even bother to name his siblings. The point is made clear that his mother and brothers do not hear or practice God's word.

The author of the Gospel of Luke is also the author of *Acts of the Apostles*, which supposedly describes what happened after Jesus died. In *Acts of the Apostles* it is absolutely clear that the James who is a prominent leader is not a literal brother of Jesus.

Parts of Acts are written in a first person style, but it is doubtful that the author of Acts was actually present for any of this. Acts was probably written some time between 90 and 130 CE, using a combination of the letters of Paul and other sources. *The Harper Collins*

NRSV Study Bible has this to say about the authorship of Acts:

Authorship:

... The author remains anonymous, although he will be referred to as "Luke" in deference to tradition. From indications within the two volumes [Luke and Acts], it appears that Luke may be a gentile Christian who has received a good education and has made careful study of Jewish scriptures.

Sources:

...The sections of Acts written in the first-person plural ("we") often prompt the suggestion that Luke had a journal (his own or that of one of Paul's companions), but the use of first-personal plural may simply be a stylistic device.

The parts of Acts that are written in the first-person plural may or may not actually be real first hand accounts, but what is certain is that the introduction of Acts is definitely not a first hand account, and the introduction of Acts is the only place that mentions literal "brothers" of Jesus. This is in a scene closely following the ascension of Jesus into heaven.

Let's look at this introduction and the mention of Jesus' brothers more closely:

Acts 1:

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. 13 When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. **Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.** 14 **They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.**

15 In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) 16 and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus— 17 he was one of our number and shared in this ministry."

This part of Acts is either completely made up by the author or is the author's retelling of tradition, but this is not even a potential eyewitness account as it is not one of the sections that includes the "we" passages, which begin after the 12th chapter of Acts. The author lists the names of the apostles starting with those who are considered "pillars" of the Christian movement. The first three apostles he lists are Peter, John, and James. The James that he lists among the first three is the James who is considered a pillar. We see these same names listed by Paul in Galatians.

Galatians 2:

9 James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they

recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews.

After the author of Acts lists the apostles, he then says that they joined Mary and the brothers of Jesus. Mary and the brothers are clearly a different group of people, whom the apostles are said to have joined with. This is the one and only mention of literal brothers of Jesus in Acts, and between both the Gospel of Luke and Acts the author never provides any names for any of the supposed brothers of Jesus. A "James brother of Jesus" is never introduced. However, things do get tricky in *Acts of the Apostles*. It is also important to note that there was a second James listed among the apostles as well, James son of Alphaeus.

In *Acts of the Apostles* the travels of Paul are discussed as well as the actions of Peter, James, and the other supposed apostles. The term "the brothers" is used several times to talk about some group of people, which seems to include James. However, in Acts 12 the text says that James son of Zebedee was killed, and this is where much confusion starts.

Acts 1:

In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) 16 and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus— 17 he was one of our number and shared in this ministry."

Acts 10:

23 Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests. **The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along.** 24 The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. 26 But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."

Acts 12:

1 It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. **2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.** 3 When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. 4 After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

Acts 12:

16 But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the

door and saw him, they were astonished. 17 Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. **"Tell James and the brothers about this,"** he said, and then he left for another place.

Acts 15:

12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. 13 **When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me.** 14 Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. 15 The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

Acts 21:

15 After this, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. 16 Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples.

17 When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. 18 The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. 19 Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

20 When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law.

We can see here several instances of the use of "the brothers," as well as the references to James and a discussion of Paul meeting James in Jerusalem in Acts 21. Nowhere in Acts does the author state that any James is a brother of Jesus, and in the passage that describes Paul's meeting with James, the author says that Paul met with the brothers, though clearly not literal brothers of Jesus.

We have two problems here though. First of all, James son of Zebedee was supposedly killed in Acts 12, and second of all, this isn't the first mention of Paul meeting the apostles in Jerusalem in the book of Acts. The first mention in Acts of Paul (also called Saul) meeting the apostles occurs in Acts 9.

Acts 9:

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. 20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. 21 All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" 22 Yet Saul grew

more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

23 After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, 24 but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. 25 But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

26 When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. 28 **So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.** 29 He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him. 30 **When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.**

31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

Though there are elements of the story in Acts that don't correspond to the writings of Paul, the basic timing works out. The first meeting between Paul and the apostles occurs in Acts before the supposed death of James son of Zebedee, and this presumably corresponds to Paul's first meeting with Peter and James in Galatians 1. The details of these accounts are different, but the basic timing can be viewed as compatible.

Galatians 1:

15 But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.

18 Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. 21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, 22 and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; 23 they only heard it said, 'The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy.' 24 And they glorified God because of me.

Galatians 2:

1 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with

Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. 2 I went up in response to a revelation. Then I laid before them (though only in a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running, or had not run, in vain.

...

9 James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews.

From Paul's letters it shows that he met with Peter and James at some early point, and then he went back to Jerusalem 14 years later and met with the apostles again. Nowhere, in Paul's letters does Paul indicate that the James he met the first time is different from the James that he met the second time, and at any rate, he mentions that the apostle James was "the Lord's brother" when discussing the first meeting. Paul also never says anything about James dying. Acts says that Paul first met the disciples in Damascus, which contradicts what the letters of Paul say. It's certain that Acts is not totally accurate, and that the author of Acts made a few things up or based some story elements on traditions that were made up. The book of Acts is where the Gospel story was merged with the apostolic reality, and as can be expected when blending fact with fiction, inconsistencies arose. This is all the more interesting in Acts because there is a clear differentiation between Acts 1-12 and the later chapters, which contain a more historical story line.

We know one thing for sure though, which is that as far as the author of Acts was concerned, "James" was not a literal brother of Jesus, because a brother of Jesus named James is never mentioned by the author of Acts in either of his works. He wouldn't just introduce an unknown character out of the blue that is supposed to be the real life brother of Jesus without even stating that the person was the brother of Jesus. In Christian tradition, and in most Bibles that have footnotes, the mentions of James after the supposed killing of James son of Zebedee are referenced as the brother of Jesus via footnotes that tie this James to the passage from Paul in Galatians that says "the Lord's brother". Clearly, though, this is not legitimate as nothing within Acts itself makes this association. So, what are the possible answers to who this James is?

There are several possibilities. The first possibility is that the James mentioned after the supposed death of James son of Zebedee is James son of Alphaeus who was also listed as an apostle who was among them during this incident. This would mean that Paul possibly met with James son of Zebedee in Galatians 1 and James son of Alphaeus in Galatians 2.

The second possibility is that the author of Acts somehow got his sources confused and he accidentally recorded the killing of the wrong James, or he put this incident at the wrong place in the time line and in fact Peter and James were not put in prison until later. This could be the case, in which case the killing of "James" in other accounts, such as the accounts of Hegesippus and Josephus, which we will look at later, could be describing the

same incident that is described in Acts 12, though Acts 12 is out of order.

This is not unlikely actually, because Acts is considered to exist in two distinct parts, chapters 1 through 12 and chapters 13-28, which are thought to be derived from two different sources that were combined together. In fact there could be overlap with these sections, and thus what is described in Acts 21 could actually have occurred at the same time as what is in Acts 9. These could well be two different descriptions, from two different sources, of the same events, in which case both of the meetings of Paul with James as described in Acts would be talking about James son of Zebedee, and the killing of James son of Zebedee in Acts 12 would likely have occurred in the 60s CE.

If that is the case then the other mentions of the the killing of James, possibly by Josephus and Hegesippus, are really talking about the killing of James son of Zebedee, who was called "James the Just" and "the brother of the Lord". James son of Zebedee would perhaps have had those titles because he was some outstanding community leader.

A third option is that Acts 12:2 is a later interpolation, inserted into the text in order to blot James son of Zebedee out of the history.

In both the writings of Paul and in the Gospels conflict between James son of Zebedee and the others is shown. There was some kind of tension between the brothers of Zebedee and the rest of the apostles. It appears, according to the writings of Paul, that James and John Zebedee held to a more Jewish version of the faith and did not embrace the Gentile apostleship.

In the 1st century, however, James son of Zebedee was considered a pillar of the Christian community, but perhaps later Christians sought to exclude him from the tradition and sever ties to his sect.

There is support for Acts 12:2 being an interpolation within the text itself, because there is no discussion of the death of James, and the narrative goes on as if nothing happened. Indeed if you take that one sentence out no one would ever suspect that the James being talked about in later chapters was no longer James son of Zebedee.

If this James really were killed at this point in the Acts narrative, and this narrative were true, then there would have been no reason for the Gospels to have played up the role of James son of Zebedee in the first place. The playing up of his role in the Gospels was presumably done because of this person's later leadership. This was a means of establishing who the leaders were, by tying them into important roles in the narrative. So much effort was put into establishing the trio of Peter, James, and John in the Gospels, while the brothers of Jesus had one line written about them in each Gospel, which only stated that Jesus rejected them, yet we are to then believe that the James mentioned among the Peter, James, and John of later importance refers to a different James than the one referred to in the Gospels and Acts? This clearly makes no sense.

There is even further support for the idea that James the pillar whom Paul met was not a literal brother of Jesus and was perhaps James son of Zebedee.

One of the few other early mentions of James comes from the Gospel of Thomas, which does not mention any literal brothers of Jesus, nor does it ascribe a brotherly status to James.

12 The disciples said to Jesus, "We know that you are going to leave us. Who will be our leader?"

Jesus said to them, "No matter where you are you are to go to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being."

- Gospel of Thomas

This seems like an odd thing to have Jesus say if "James the Just" is the brother of Jesus, as this would have been the perfect place to have Jesus say "Turn to my brother James the Just," etc. Not only would it be odd not to call James his brother here, but it's also odd to give the reason, "*for whose sake heaven and earth came into being.*" This is quite a strange thing to say in any account, ascribing the entire creation of the universe to the grandeur of this one man.

This leads to other questions. In the synoptic Gospels we have James son of Zebedee, along with his brother John, portrayed as one of the three most important disciples and the one perhaps closest to Jesus. In the Gospel of Thomas we have Jesus saying that "James the Just" is the one "*for whose sake heaven and earth came into being.*"

What, then, do we have in the Gospel of John? In the Gospel of John, James and John son of Zebedee are never named, but we do have an unnamed "beloved disciple". Who is the beloved disciple, and why does he remain unnamed? This question has puzzled scholars for centuries, but the answer may well be that James son of Zebedee is the "beloved disciple" in the Gospel of John precisely because by the time that the Gospel of John was written James son of Zebedee had become a pariah, thus he was not mentioned by name. His sect, by that time, may have been rejected by those who viewed the Jesus Christ movement as a Gentile movement, while James' sect had been a more Jewish oriented group.

Traditionally John son of Zebedee has been considered the "beloved disciple" and author of the Gospel of John, but scholars today recognize that this is not likely to be the case. But why would this Gospel have been ascribed to John in the first place? One of the main reasons is that neither John nor James, two people considered to be the most important apostles, are mentioned in the Gospel of John. How could one explain the fact that two of the most important apostles aren't in the last Gospel? The explanation that gained favor was that this Gospel was written by John son of Zebedee himself, which is why he never mentioned himself, supposedly out of humility.

This is all highly unlikely however. The more reasonable explanation is that James and John Zebedee were not mentioned because they were out of favor at that time in the community in which this Gospel was written.

However, with the beloved disciple the author of John may have been stating that there

was someone who played an important role in the early church, who was viewed by the early community as one of the greatest apostles, but this person was now anathema, the one "whose name we dare not speak", James son of Zebedee.

Let's look at the Gospel of John to get a better understanding of the "beloved disciple".

John 13:

22 His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. **23 One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him.** 24 Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means."

25 Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?"

John 19:

25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. **26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son,"** 27 and to the disciple, **"Here is your mother."** From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

These are the only clear references to the beloved disciple in what is believed to be the original text. There is another reference to *"the disciple whom Jesus loved"* in John 21, but John 21 was probably added to the text later by a different author, and thus may not clearly play into the same theme.

John 21:

7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. 8 The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. 9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

...

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you

love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

18 Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." 19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") 21 When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

22 Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." 23 Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"

The addition of John 21 was probably done in order to establish Peter as the rightful leader of the Christian community and to tie the Church to the traditions in his name. It's not clear that the later author had the same intentions as the earlier author with the usage of the the beloved disciple. Since John son of Zebedee has traditionally been identified as the beloved disciple, hence the reason that this is called the Gospel of John, it is likely that the author who added John 21 believed that the beloved disciple was John himself.

However, the unnamed disciple in the Gospel of John would seem to be *James* son of Zebedee, as James was the one given prominence in the synoptics and the one who is named as the most important in the Gospel of Thomas. All of this comes together not only to make perfect sense, but to explain many things that are unexplainable via the traditional Christian interpretation.

Peter, James and John sons of Zebedee were clearly the central apostles in the early Christian movement. Later on, as the Peterine and Pauline sects broke away and became dominant, James and his Jewish sect became anathema, and this would be why, by the time the Gospel of John was being written, the names of James and John were not mentioned, instead James was called "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*" to indicate that this was talking about an important person who nevertheless was to remain unnamed.

Later, in the second century, the rewriting of history took place and James son of Zebedee was replaced in the Christian tradition with a fictitious "James brother of Jesus", not necessarily intentionally by all those involved, but perhaps unintentionally out of real

ignorance and confusion by later Christians.

If this is the case, then the reason that Paul called James "the Lord's brother" in Galatians is because James was seen as such a major pillar of the community, whom people called a "brother of the Lord", which was a title similar to "the Just". Paul's "the Lord's brother" was just a version of "James the Just", as mentioned in the Gospel of Thomas, both of which were talking about James son of Zebedee. This would also why the author of the Gospel of John put Mary at the crucifixion scene and had Jesus say to Mary in John 19:26-27 that this disciple was now "her son".

This would be the author of John's way of saying that this is the apostle who was called "the Lord's brother", a.k.a. "James the Just", a.k.a. James son of Zebedee, a real person and the real leader of the early Judean church. Indeed the 2nd century Christian scholar Origen alluded to as much himself.

Paul, a genuine disciple of Jesus, says that he regarded this James as a brother of the Lord, not so much on account of their relationship by blood, or of their being brought up together, as because of his virtue and doctrine

- *Against Celsus*; Origen

So, the answer to the issue of whether or not Paul met a literal brother of Jesus, which would tie Jesus into history, is no, Paul did not meet a literal brother of Jesus, he most likely met James son of Zebedee, who was a pillar of the Jewish sect of Christ worshipers. This James was only later believed to be a literal brother of Jesus. It was probably the early Christian chronicler Hegesippus, in the late 2nd century, who recorded the first concrete association of James the Just as the literal brother of Jesus, helping to cement this view into Church tradition.

James, the Lord's brother, succeeds to the government of the Church, in conjunction with the apostles. He has been universally called the Just, from the days of the Lord down to the present time. For many bore the name of James; but this one was holy from his mother's womb. He drank no wine or other intoxicating liquor, nor did he eat flesh; no razor came upon his head; he did not anoint himself with oil, nor make use of the bath. He alone was permitted to enter the holy place: for he did not wear any woolen garment, but fine linen only. ... Therefore, in consequence of his pre-eminent justice, he was called the Just, and Oblias, which signifies in Greek Defense of the People, and Justice, in accordance with what the prophets declare concerning him.

- *Commentaries on the Acts of the Church*; Hegesippus, 165-175

When Hegesippus says "the Lord's brother" here he is taking this from tradition, but here it is clearly meant as the "literal brother of Jesus", and by this time he himself probably really believed that was who this James was. From the 3rd century on it was assumed by most that the James who was an early church leader was a literal "brother of the Lord".

The introduction of the 4th century *Acts of Philip*, however, indicates that "brother of the Lord" was a title, not an actual family relationship with Jesus.

About the time when the Emperor Trajan received the government of the Romans, after Simon the son of Clopas, who was bishop of Jerusalem, had suffered martyrdom in the eighth year of his reign, being the second bishop of the church there **after James who bore the name of brother of the Lord**, Philip the apostle, going through the cities and regions of Lydia and Asia, preached to all the Gospel of Christ.

- *The Acts of Philip*; 4th century

In further support of this there is also the Epistle of James, which is traditionally associated with "James the Just", supposedly the literal brother of Jesus, but the letter itself does not say that the author is a brother of Jesus.

James 1:

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

Why would this greeting not say "James, a brother of the Lord Jesus Christ," if this person was indeed his brother? Nothing in the letter indicates that this James is a brother of Jesus. It's hardly believable that a literal brother of Jesus would not indicate such in a letter authored by him, or that if this letter is pseudonymous the person writing in the name of James, presumably to lend authority to the writing, would not have indicated that James was the brother of Jesus if James being the brother of Jesus was indeed a part of the tradition at that time.

So, against the claim that the James Paul described meeting in Galatians 1 was a literal brother of Jesus, we have the fact that none of the other early Christian writings indicate that the important figure who was called James was a brother of Jesus, nor do any brothers of Jesus play important roles in any of the Gospels. Even if the "beloved disciple" is not James son of Zebedee, it is clear that the author of Acts did not consider any James that he talked about to be a family member of Jesus. While Acts is a flawed and legendary writing, it is inconceivable that something so substantial would be overlooked by the author. The whole point of Acts was to clarify the authority of the major apostles and community leaders. That the author of Acts would have left out the fact that one of the community leaders was a literal brother of Jesus simply makes no sense. If the author of Acts believed that any of the "Jameses" that he mentioned were literal brothers of Jesus, then he would have stated so in his writing, so it is clear that even by the time Acts was written the belief that James was a family member of Jesus was not yet established. Regardless of who the second James in Acts was, it clearly wasn't "the brother of Jesus".

Unless all of the writers between Paul and the late 2nd century, those being the the writers of the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles, didn't realize or simply forgot that James was a literal brother of Jesus, then it's clear that the James who was an important apostle and played an important role in the community was not a literal brother of Jesus, and thus Paul did not describe meeting a literal brother of Jesus in Galatians 1:19.

Historical Silence

There is not one single writing from or about Jesus during his supposed lifetime

Like the supposed founders of many religions, Jesus left no personal writings of any kind, nor any trace of his existence. Indeed his supposed bodily ascension into heaven precludes the possibility of there even being any bodily evidence for his existence, if that story were to be believed. No writing, graffiti, or evidence of any kind has ever been found from the period in which he supposedly lived that establishes the existence of Jesus.

If we take the view that Jesus was indeed God, then it would be peculiar that he was unable to write and chose to write nothing himself. Of course the counter argument to this is that God wanted people to have faith so he intentionally didn't leave any evidence of himself. Okay...

If we take the view of Jesus was a real person who was a teacher and the leader of a religious movement, then we could expect that this person would have produced his own writings, since other rabbis, theologians, and teachers did. However, it is always possible that this person may not have been able to write or that none of his writings were preserved. Still, if we did have writings from Jesus that would certainly clear many things up, but we don't.

If we are to take the Gospels as our guide to the life of Jesus Christ, then we must look at Pontius Pilate as the figure who solidifies the period in which Jesus must have lived. Pilate was the governor of Judea from 26 to 36 CE, a ten year period. The Jesus of the Gospels, then, had to have lived and been killed during this period if the Gospels are true accounts.

Scholars go further and state that based on the information given in the Gospels Jesus had to have died in either the year 27, 30, or 33 CE. Since, aside from the dubious birth stories in Matthew and Luke, the Gospels deal strictly with a supposed ministry of Jesus that lasted from 1 to 3 years, we are looking at a date range from about 24 CE to 36 CE as the period during which we could look for writings about Jesus that were produced during his "lifetime".

Indeed the Gospels themselves state many times that "scribes" were present during the various acts of Jesus, yet we have no records from these supposed scribes. Nothing in the Jewish midrash of the time mentions anything about Jesus Christ or any of the events in the Gospels.

Not only this, but there are many people that lived during the supposed lifetime of Jesus, whose written works have been preserved, and whom we could expect to have written about him. Here are some of the primary persons who lived during the supposed lifetime of Jesus, whose works we have, and who we could reasonably expect would have mentioned Jesus had he existed, yet they do not.

Person	Description of them and their works
Justus of Tiberias	Jewish historian who lived in Galilee during the 1st century and wrote two preserved works, a history of the Jewish War of 66-70 and a chronicle of the Jewish people from Moses to the death of Agrippa II in 100 CE, covering the period in which Jesus supposedly lived. (Justus may have lived slightly after the supposed death of Jesus)
Philo of Alexandria	Jewish historian, philosopher, theologian, and community leader who lived from 20 BCE to 50 CE in Alexandria Egypt, but reported on events throughout the Mediterranean world. He specifically wrote about conflicts between Pontius Pilate and Jews during Pilate's governorship of Judea.
Pliny the Elder	Roman historian and philosopher who lived from 23-79 CE. He traveled throughout the Roman Empire, though mostly in the northern regions. Most of his works, over 200 manuscripts, are preserved.
Seneca the Younger	Roman philosopher and statesman who lived from 3 BCE to 65 CE. He traveled throughout the Roman Empire and was the private tutor of Nero. His brother Gallio heard charges brought by Jews against the apostle Paul, but he dismissed the charges. Many of the works of Seneca survive, including over 100 letters on morality.
Valerius Maximus	Roman writer who lived from 20 BCE to 50 CE, who traveled to various places in the Roman Empire, including eastern portions of the empire. He wrote a popular series of books on memorable sayings and deeds collected from throughout the empire in 30 CE.
Velleius Paterculus	Roman military officer and historian who lived from 20 BCE to 31 CE. He served in the military in the eastern portions of the empire and wrote a surviving work, <i>Compendium of Roman History</i> , which covers history up through 14 CE. Other materials survive as well. His <i>Compendium of Roman History</i> actually spends a lot of time discussing non-Romans as well.

All of the people mentioned above lived during the same time that Jesus supposedly lived and are prime candidates for being potential witnesses and documenters of the existence of Jesus. Obviously not all of these people are equally likely to have known of Jesus, but the two major candidates are the Jewish writers, Justus and Philo. Philo is such a special case that I will address him more fully in the next section.

The fact that Justus of Tiberias made no mention of the Christian Jesus has "baffled" scholars for centuries, and for a long time some Christians dismissed this as an early Jewish conspiracy to erase him from history. The fact remains, however, that in the works of Justus of Tiberias there was a well preserved history of the region, written by someone from Galilee around the time that Jesus was supposedly alive and who lived many years

beyond that time, in which no mention of the Christian Jesus was made. Surely a Jew from Galilee would have made at least some comment about Jesus if he existed as described in the Gospels, or anything even remotely close to the Gospels, would he not?

The overwhelming lack of commentary about Jesus in the historical sources of his supposed time has troubled Christians from the very beginning. As early as the 2nd century this lack of acknowledgment was noticed. Indeed it was not long before forgeries attesting to the existence of Jesus were produced. Other such evidences were either intentionally manufactured or inadvertently created through the eye of the beholder.

There are several false attestations to Jesus that are of note, among these are:

- Letters of Pilate
- Letter from Herod Antipas
- Letter of Agbar
- Letters of Caiaphas
- Testimony of Thallus and Phlegon

All of these supposed evidences from the time of Jesus are universally accepted by scholars as fraudulent or corrupted. Some of these supposed evidences for the existence of Jesus, and more, have been relatively recent forgeries, produced at various times from the Middle Ages through to the 20th century.

As early as the 2nd century forged letters from Pilate began circulating. One of these letters was a letter that was supposedly from Pilate to the Roman Senate detailing the events of the execution of Jesus. Other supposed letters of Pilate were confessions and a correspondence with Herod Antipas. The period from the 2nd to the 4th centuries saw a large volume of writings about Jesus, with various anonymous writers adding many elements to the story of Jesus. Many of these writings are included in what we commonly call the New Testament apocrypha. The apocrypha includes things like the *Gospel of Judas* and the *Acts of Pilate*. These types of works were written for a variety of reasons, ranging from people simply wishing to write popular works or fill out elements of the story, to political reasons and desires to shift the public perception of various groups such as Jews or Romans, to attempts to further establish the legitimacy of Jesus.

Many of these works have been deemed "inauthentic" by the Church basically from the beginning and modern historians confirm that they are written from imagination and based on other scriptures and are not themselves of any historical value, other than attesting to the volume of clearly spurious writing that took place in the early years of Christianity.

Other documents, such as the supposed Testimony of Phlegon and/or Thallus, have been accepted by the Church at various times, but are now widely debunked as historically inaccurate as already discussed.

Philo

Philo, a prolific Jewish writer who lived from 20 BCE to 50 CE, wrote extensively about the political and theological movements throughout the Mediterranean, and his views foreshadowed Christian theology, yet he never once wrote anything about Jesus. Not only this, but he actually wrote about political conflicts between the Jews and Pontius Pilate in Judea

Of all the potential witnesses to the life of Jesus, Philo of Alexandria deserves special attention. Some of the reasons that Philo deserves special attention include:

- Philo's writings foreshadow Christian ideas in many ways
- Almost all of the works of Philo are preserved
- Some of Philo's writings *may* have been used by the authors of the Gospels
- Philo's life perfectly spans the supposed life of Jesus
- Philo was a community leader and active in the social movements of his day
- Philo reported on the political and religious events of his day
- Philo provides the only contemporary account of Pontius Pilate in all of ancient literature
- Philo personally knew several of the historical figures in the Jesus story
- Philo would surely have written about someone like "Jesus Christ" if he had known of him

Philo was a Hellenistic Jew who lived in Alexandria Egypt, but traveled throughout the empire. Philo appears to have had both a Jewish and Greek education, for he demonstrates that he was well versed in both schools of thought, which he merged into his own worldview. Philo did not discuss "a Messiah" in any of his writings, though he did talk several times about something like a messianic era, a time of peace and perfection in the world.

We know that Philo traveled to Jerusalem at least once and he also traveled to Rome in 39 CE as head ambassador of the Jews to address complaints about the practice of putting statues of Roman Emperors in Jewish synagogues. Philo also made donations to the Temple in Jerusalem as well.

In addition to all of this, Philo was a grandson of Herod the Great and knew Herod Agrippa I to whom he personally loaned money. Agrippa I was king of the Jews of Judea from 41-44 CE. Philo's brother was also involved in government. Philo's whole life was intimately tied to the politics and events of the region and Jewish communities throughout the Roman Empire.

In 40 CE Philo wrote *On the Embassy to Gaius*, in which he mentioned Pontius Pilate. Gaius refers to the emperor Caligula. Not only does this work discuss the reign of Pontius Pilate in Judea, but it also discusses a number of ideas that demonstrate Philo's deep concern for, and knowledge of, issues directly related to the Jewish religion.

The following is the portion which discusses the reign of Pilate:

XXXVII. (294) But why need I invoke the assistance of foreign witnesses when I have plenty with whom I can furnish you from among your own countrymen and friends? Marcus Agrippa, your own grandfather on the mother's side, the moment that he arrived in Judaea, **when Herod, my grandfather, was king of the country,** thought fit to go up from the sea-coast to the metropolis, which was inland.

(295) And when he had beheld the temple, and the decorations of the priests, and the piety and holiness of the people of the country, he marveled, looking upon the whole matter as one of great solemnity and entitled to great respect, and thinking that he had beheld what was too magnificent to be described. And he could talk of nothing else to his companions but the magnificence of the temple and every thing connected with it. (296) Therefore, every day that he remained in the city, by reason of his friendship for Herod, he went to that sacred place, being delighted with the spectacle of the building, and of the sacrifices, and all the ceremonies connected with the worship of God, and the regularity which was observed, and the dignity and honor paid to the high priest, and his grandeur when arrayed in his sacred vestments and when about to begin the sacrifices. (297) And after he had adorned the temple with all the offerings in his power to contribute, and had conferred many benefits on the inhabitants, doing them many important services, and having said to Herod many friendly things, and having been replied to in corresponding terms, he was conducted back again to the sea coast, and to the harbor, and that not by one city only but by the whole country, having branches strewed in his road, and being greatly admired and respected for his piety. (298) **What again did your other grandfather, Tiberius Caesar, do? Does not he appear to have adopted an exactly similar line of conduct? At all events, during the three and twenty years that he was emperor, he preserved the form of worship in the temple as it had been handed down from the earliest times, without abrogating or altering the slightest particular of it.**

XXXVIII. (299) Moreover, I have it in my power to relate one act of ambition on his part, though I suffered an infinite number of evils when he was alive; but nevertheless the truth is considered dear, and much to be honored by you. **Pilate was one of the emperor's lieutenants, having been appointed governor of Judaea. He, not more with the object of doing honor to Tiberius than**

with that of vexing the multitude, dedicated some gilt shields in the palace of Herod, in the holy city; which had no form nor any other forbidden thing represented on them except some necessary inscription, which mentioned these two facts, the name of the person who had placed them there, and the person in whose honor they were so placed there. (300) But when the multitude heard what had been done, and when the circumstance became notorious, then the people, putting forward the four sons of the king, who were in no respect inferior to the kings themselves, in fortune or in rank, and his other descendants, and those magistrates who were among them at the time, entreated him to alter and to rectify the innovation which he had committed in respect of the shields; and not to make any alteration in their national customs, which had hitherto been preserved without any interruption, without being in the least degree changed by any king or emperor. (301) But when he steadfastly refused this petition (for he was a man of a very inflexible disposition, and very merciless as well as very obstinate), they cried out: 'Do not cause a sedition; do not make war upon us; do not destroy the peace which exists. The honor of the emperor is not identical with dishonor to the ancient laws; let it not be to you a pretence for heaping insult on our nation. Tiberius is not desirous that any of our laws or customs shall be destroyed. And if you yourself say that he is, show us either some command from him, or some letter, or something of the kind, that we, who have been sent to you as ambassadors, may cease to trouble you, and may address our supplications to your master.' (302) But this last sentence exasperated him in the greatest possible degree, as he feared least they might in reality go on an embassy to the emperor, and might impeach him with respect to other particulars of his government, in respect of his corruption, and his acts of insolence, and his rapine, and his habit of insulting people, and his cruelty, and his continual murders of people untried and uncondemned, and his never ending, and gratuitous, and most grievous inhumanity. (303) Therefore, being exceedingly angry, and being at all times a man of most ferocious passions, he was in great perplexity, neither venturing to take down what he had once set up, nor wishing to do any thing which could be acceptable to his subjects, and at the same time being sufficiently acquainted with the firmness of Tiberius on these points. And those who were in power in our nation, seeing this, and perceiving that he was

inclined to change his mind as to what he had done, but that he was not willing to be thought to do so, wrote a most supplicatory letter to Tiberius. (304) And he, when he had read it, what did he say of Pilate, and what threats did he utter against him! But it is beside our purpose at present to relate to you how very angry he was, although he was not very liable to sudden anger; since the facts speak for themselves; (305) for immediately, without putting any thing off till the next day, he wrote a letter, reproaching and reviling him in the most bitter manner for his act of unprecedented audacity and wickedness, and commanding him immediately to take down the shields and to convey them away from the metropolis of Judaea to Caesarea, on the sea which had been named Caesarea Augusta, after his grandfather, in order that they might be set up in the temple of Augustus. And accordingly, they were set up in that edifice. And in this way he provided for two matters: both for the honor due to the emperor, and for the preservation of the ancient customs of the city.

- *On the Embassy to Gaius*; Philo, 40 CE

Here Philo has obviously demonstrated an in-depth knowledge of the affairs of Judea during the rule of Pilate, and he does mention various executions that took place under Pilate. Interestingly, however, Philo accuses Pilate of being a cruel and bad ruler, yet in the Gospels Pilate is portrayed as a fair and concerned ruler, who is forced to have Jesus crucified against his own will by the Jewish mobs, quite the opposite of the situation that Philo describes.

While it may or may not have been appropriate for Philo to have mentioned Jesus in this particular writing, he demonstrates an in depth knowledge of the happenings in Judea under Pilate and a concern for issues of justice and religion. If Jesus existed as described in the Gospels then surely Philo would have known about him. Philo had a personal knowledge of all of the main historical figures in the Gospel stories and a personal interest in the ideas that were later expressed in the Gospels. If Philo had known about Jesus he surely would have written something about him. Instead, however, we see writings from Philo, such as *On the Embassy to Gaius*, which give no indication that anything special happened in Judea during the time when Jesus was supposedly preaching and was killed according to the Gospels.

Many of Philo's ideas also influenced later Christians and were revered by them, which is the main reason why virtually all of his works survive. Clearly Philo's ideas were in line with Christianity in many ways. One example of this is Philo's discussion of the Creation.

And Philolaus gives his testimony to this doctrine of mine in the following words: "for God," says he "is the ruler and Lord of all things, being one, eternal, lasting,

immovable, himself like to himself, and different from all other beings."

- *A Treatise on the Account of the Creation of the World, as Given by Moses; Philo*

It is plain therefore that the creator of all created things, and the maker of all the things that have ever been made, and the governor of all the things which are subject to government, must of necessity be a being of universal knowledge; and he is in truth the father, and creator, and governor of all things in heaven and in the whole world; and indeed future events are overshadowed by the distance of future time, which is sometimes a short and sometimes a long interval. (31) But God is the creator of time also; for he is the father of its father, and the father of time is the world, which made its own mother the creation of time, so that time stands towards God in the relation of a grandson; for this world is a younger son of God, inasmuch as it is perceptible by the outward sense; for the only son he speaks of as older than the world, is Idea...

- *On the Unchangeableness of God; Philo*

For God, while he spake the word, did at the same moment create; nor did he allow anything to come between the word and the deed;

- *On The Birth Of Abel and the Sacrifices Offered by Him and by His Brother Cain; Philo*

Now the image of God is the Word, by which all the world was made.

- *The Special Laws; Philo*

Compare the above statements from Philo to the opening of the Gospel of John:

John 1:

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning.

3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

Philo described how virtue grows from the smallest seed, resembling the Parable of the Mustard Seed from the synoptic Gospels.

For just as when the stalks of plants are cut away, if the roots are left undestroyed, new growths shoot up which supersede the old, so too if in the soul a tiny seed be left of the qualities which promote virtue, though other things have been stripped away, still from the little seed springs fourth the fairest and most precious things in

human life, by which states are constituted and with
manned good citizens, the nations grow into a great
population.

- *De Praemiis et Poenis*; Philo

Philo also wrote about the mocking of a man as a Jewish king in 39 CE. Philo's account of persecution remarkably resembles the later account written in the Gospels about the trial and mocking of Jesus.

<p>(36) There was a certain madman named Carabbas ... this man spent all his days and nights naked in the roads, minding neither cold nor heat, the sport of idle children and wanton youths;</p> <p>(37) and they, driving the poor wretch as far as the public gymnasium, and setting him up there on high that he might be seen by everybody, flattened out a leaf of papyrus and put it on his head instead of a diadem, and clothed the rest of his body with a common door mat instead of a cloak and instead of a scepter they put in his hand a small stick of the native papyrus which they found lying by the way side and gave to him;</p> <p>(38) and when, like actors in theatrical spectacles, he had received all the insignia of royal authority, and had been dressed and adorned like a king, the young men bearing sticks on their shoulders stood on each side of him instead of spear-bearers, in imitation of the bodyguards of the king, and then others came up, some as if to salute him, and others making as though they wished to plead their causes before him, and others pretending to wish to consult with him about the affairs of the state.</p> <p>(39) Then from the multitude of those who were standing around there arose a wonderful shout of men calling out Maris!; and this is the name by which it is said that they call the kings among the Syrians; for they knew that Agrippa [King Herod of the Jews] was by birth a Syrian, and also that he was possessed of a great district of Syria of which he was the sovereign;</p> <p>- <i>Flaccus IV</i>; Philo</p>	<p>27:26 Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.</p> <p>27:27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers.</p> <p>27:28 And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.</p> <p>27:29 And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!</p> <p>- Gospel of Matthew</p>
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The mocking of individuals as kings was apparently not an uncommon practice during this period, so it cannot be certain that the writers of the Gospels drew specifically on this writing by Philo, but the similarities are remarkable.

From all of this we can see that Philo was a prime candidate to be an independent witness to Jesus Christ. Philo was aware of the goings-on in Judea, he personally knew the historical persons associated with the story, he is our only contemporary source of information on Pilate, he was interested in the ideas expressed in Christianity, he wrote prolifically about the events that took place in the Jewish communities of the Mediterranean, and virtually all of his works have been preserved. Yet, despite all this, not only does he not mention Jesus, but there is nothing in his writings to indicate that anything remarkable happened during the supposed time of Jesus.

This can be called an argument from absence, but this is a striking absence. What the works of Philo, and also Justus, demonstrate is that we do have high quality sources for potential independent witnesses to Jesus, it is not as though we are lacking potential sources, but they make no mention of Jesus Christ.

Other References to Jesus?

All of the non-Christian references to Jesus can be shown to have either been introduced later by Christian scribes or were originally based on Christian claims

There are four primary non-Christian potential references to Jesus Christ in the existing literature. All of these references are in works that were written after the Gospels had been written and, as with all ancient works, they come down to us through a long line of translations and hand copying.

In the later part of the 2nd century and afterwards "Jesus Christ" was written about by increasing numbers of people, however these later references are acknowledged by scholars today to have been based on the regularly circulating stories about Jesus from the Gospels, not on independent accounts of Jesus. The four primary potential sources for independent accounts of Jesus are as follows:

- *Antiquity of the Jews* by Josephus, written in 94 CE (two separate references)
- *The Annals* by Tacitus, written in 109 CE
- *Letter to Trajan* by Pliny the Younger, written in 112 CE
- *The Lives of the Caesars* by Suetonius, written in 120 CE

The four sources listed above have long been recognized as the primary documents that potentially attest to the historical existence of Jesus.

Of these four sources the most important is *Antiquity of the Jews* by Josephus, so we will discuss it last. Indeed, modern scholarship universally recognizes a reference in *Antiquity of the Jews*, known as the *Testimonium Flavianum*, as the only remaining potential historical affirmation of the existence of Jesus Christ outside of the Bible. Despite that, the reasons why the others source are no longer considered witnesses to the existence of Jesus should still be explained.

Suetonius - The Lives of the Caesars

First let us tackle the reference in the work by Suetonius.

3 He forbade men of foreign birth to use the Roman names so far as those of the clans were concerned. Those who usurped the privileges of Roman citizenship he executed in the Esquiline field. He restored to the senate the provinces of Achaia and Macedonia, which Tiberius had taken into his own charge. He deprived the Lycians of their independence because of deadly intestine feuds, and restored theirs to the Rhodians, since they had given up their former faults. He allowed the people of Ilium perpetual exemption from tribute, on the ground that they were the founders of the Roman race, reading an ancient letter of the senate and people of Rome written in Greek

to king Seleucus, in which they promised him their friendship and alliance only on condition that he should keep their kinsfolk of Ilium free from every burden. 4 **Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.** He allowed the envoys of the Germans to sit in the orchestra, led by their naïve self-confidence; for when they had been taken to the seats occupied by the common people and saw the Parthian and Armenian envoys sitting with the senate, they moved of their own accord to the same part of the theatre, protesting that their merits and rank were no whit inferior. 5 He utterly abolished the cruel and inhuman religion of the Druids among the Gauls, which under Augustus had merely been prohibited to Roman citizens; on the other hand he even attempted to transfer the Eleusinian rites from Attica to Rome, and had the temple of Venus Erycina in Sicily, which had fallen to ruin through age, restored at the expense of the treasury of the Roman people. He struck his treaties with foreign princes in the Forum, sacrificing a pig and reciting the ancient formula of the fetial priests. But these and other acts, and in fact almost the whole conduct of his reign, were dictated not so much by his own judgment as that of his wives and freedmen, since he nearly always acted in accordance with their interests and desires.

- *The Lives of the Caesars* (The Life of Claudius); Suetonius, 120

The one line in bold above is the only potential reference to "Jesus Christ" that we get from Suetonius. This is a passage talking about the treatment of foreigners in Rome by the Emperor Claudius. Of this, one line deals with the Jews, whom Suetonius says were expelled from Rome in 49 CE by Claudius. As "evidence for Jesus" this passage is fraught with problems. First of all, we can only assume that Suetonius is talking about "Jesus Christ" by the use of the name "Chrestus", which corresponds to nothing and is not a proper Latin translation of the Greek Christos, though it is a proper Latin name. Secondly, this passage implies that these Jews were being instigated by someone in Rome in 49 CE, which would be impossible for the Jesus of the Gospels since he was supposedly already dead by then.

Of course it is possible that some Jews in Rome in 49 CE were making disturbances "in the name of Jesus Christ", but if that is what this is indeed talking about then that certainly isn't evidence for the existence of Jesus, it's only evidence for people doing things in the name of a god or hero figure, which was not at all uncommon. Importantly, however, if this did actually refer to Christians in Rome in 49 CE then this reference alone would be evidence of the earliest existence of followers of Jesus in Rome. All of these things make it highly unlikely that this is even referring to "Jesus Christ" at all. The majority of Jews didn't believe in the Jesus stories, thus it would be unlikely that "the Jews" would get

expelled for disturbances on behalf of Jesus because the majority of the Jews in Rome wouldn't have participated in such an event in the first place.

Some Christians try to claim that the name Chrestus by itself could only be talking about "Jesus Christ" because that is the only person that would have been well known enough that a single reference to his name could have been self-explanatory, but as we have already seen Jesus Christ was certainly not well known at this time at all, thus this argument fails.

Even if this were referring to "Jesus Christ" it's obviously nothing more than a hearsay comment being made in 120, it's hardly "evidence" for the existence of Jesus.

Pliny the Younger - Letter to Trajan

Next we have the letter from Pliny the Younger, written in 112. From 111 to 113 Pliny the Younger was governor of Pontius and Bithynia, regions in what is now northern Turkey. During his governorship Pliny the Younger came into contact with Christians for the first time. As a governor Pliny was responsible for seeing to it that all of the citizens paid their taxes, recognized the Emperor as the head of the government, and worshiped the state gods. Some Christians refused to honor the Roman gods and thus they were charged with crimes. In his letter to Trajan, Pliny discussed his contact with Christians.

The segment of the letter that mentions Christ is as follows:

Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome.

Soon accusations spread, as usually happens, because of the proceedings going on, and several incidents occurred. An anonymous document was published containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ--none of which those who are really Christians, it is said, can be forced to do--these I thought should be discharged. Others named by the informer declared that they were Christians, but then denied it,

asserting that they had been but had ceased to be, some three years before, others many years, some as much as twenty-five years. They all worshipped your image and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ.

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food--but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition.

- Letter to Trajan; Pliny the Younger, 112

As you can see, this letter does nothing to establish the historical existence of Jesus, it merely talks about Pliny's interrogation of Christians and the fact that some of them were willing to denounce Christ to avoid punishment. There is no attestation to the existence of Jesus here. This is no different than people who were later forced to denounce Zeus under the Christians, or similar such things. By all indications Pliny doesn't even show here that Christ is regarded as a person, he states that Christ is treated as a god and that all he found of the religion was nothing but "*depraved, excessive superstition.*"

It should be noted that Trajan's reply to Pliny stated that he was not to seek out Christians and that accusations against them be treated with care. He went on to warn that, "*this is both a dangerous kind of precedent and out of keeping with the spirit of our age.*"

Tacitus - The Annals

Next we move on to the statement by Tacitus in *The Annals*, written in 109 CE. *The Annals* is a large historical work that documents the reigns of Roman Emperors. Tacitus gives a detailed mention of "Christus" in a section discussing Nero and the fire of Rome.

But not all the relief that could come from man, not all the bounties that the prince could bestow, nor all the atonements which could be presented to the gods, availed to relieve Nero from the infamy of being believed to have ordered the conflagration, the fire of Rome. **Hence to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt, and punished Christians, who were hated for their enormities.**

Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular.

Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind.

- *The Annals*; Tacitus, 109

Though the name "Christus" is used here, this is clearly a reference to the "Jesus Christ" of the Gospels. There are several things of interest in this reference, but it doesn't establish the historical existence of Jesus. Indeed Tacitus is clearly relaying information that originally came from Christians themselves.

It is peculiar that Nero would have laid the blame on Christians in 64 CE. This passage has puzzled historians for some time, because by all other accounts Christians were still an extremely small and barely distinct group of people by 64 CE. It's not certain what exactly would set Christians apart from others so much in Rome at this time, how they would have been distinguished from ordinary Jews, why they would have been hated, or if the Christians persecuted by Nero were even the same Christians as those who were believers in Jesus Christ, since the term Christians was also considered to derive from people calling themselves "anointed ones". Rome was filled with literally hundreds of different religions and cults at this time and it's somewhat astonishing that Christians of all these groups would have been singled out, for we have nothing else that tells us realistically what they would have been doing to draw attention to themselves.

Regardless of this peculiarity, this passage is generally deemed authentic but it is widely recognized that it's not an independent witness to the existence of Jesus. Some Christians have tried to claim that Tacitus would have gotten his details about the death of Jesus from the Roman archives, thereby establishing the historical reality of the crucifixion. Not only is there no reason to think this, but there are good reasons to conclude that this is not possible.

First of all, Tacitus uses the name "Christus", as though it is a given first name. Tacitus apparently doesn't realize that "Christos" is a religious title, meaning "Anointed One". If "Christus" is the name that Tacitus is working from, which it is, then even if there were Roman records to be looked at he could never have found them under that name, and if he had found them otherwise he would have seen another name on them, presumably *Yeshua* or *Iēsous*, the Hebrew and Greek variants of "Jesus". "Christus" corresponds to nothing, it's a mistake of translation, or an assumption based on working backwards from the name "Christians".

Secondly, it's doubtful that there would have been any archival material to even look at if

it ever existed, since Tacitus is writing in 109, some 40 years after the military destruction of Judea.

Thirdly, there would have been no reason for Tacitus to go to an archive to write this passage. The information that he is passing on would have been common opinion by 109 CE, and this is an insignificant point amidst the larger subject of this work, which is Nero himself. Christians aren't the subject here, just a side note. We can't even say that the information Tacitus is passing on would have been known in 64 CE. Since Tacitus is writing in 109, his information is likely more detailed than what would have been known in 64, since by 109 the Gospels had probably already been in circulation for several decades.

That this statement by Tacitus is not evidence for the existence of Jesus is admitted to even by Christian scholars.

Christian New Testament scholar John P. Meier acknowledges that here Tacitus is only passing on information gleaned from Christians, he isn't making an independent attestation to the existence of Jesus.

Tacitus and Pliny the Younger reflect instead what they have heard Christians of their own day say. Despite various claims, no early rabbinic text (the earliest being the Mishna, composed ca. A.D. 200) contains information about Jesus, and later rabbinic texts simply reflect knowledge of, and mocking midrash on, Christian texts and preaching.

- The Present State of the 'Third Quest' for the Historical Jesus: Loss and Gain;
J.P. Meier, 1999

Josephus - Antiquity of the Jews

Though Meier does acknowledge that the passages from Tacitus and Pliny the Younger don't attest to the existence of Jesus, he does maintain that the writings of Josephus provide some authentic independent verification of the existence of Jesus Christ. There are two references to "Jesus Christ" in the copies that we have of Josephus' *Antiquity of the Jews*. The oldest copies of *Antiquity of the Jews* that we have come from the 9th or 10th century. All existing copies of *Antiquity of the Jews* that we have come down to us from Christian sources.

All of this is very important because the authenticity of the references to "Jesus Christ" are very controversial and very much in question.

First let's address the most controversial and important reference to "Jesus" in *Antiquity of the Jews*, known as the *Testimonium Flavianum*. As J.P. Meier indicates, the *Testimonium* is considered to be the only potential statement that independently bears witness to the existence of Jesus Christ today outside of Christian writings.

In modern times a brief passage about Jesus Christ known as the *Testimonium Flavianum* found in Book 18 of Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* has been considered to be the only extra-biblical witness to his historicity. In ancient and medieval times it was the most frequently quoted passage from Josephus' works, and it played no small role in making Josephus the most widely read Greek-language historian of the pre-modern Western world.

- *The Testimonium Flavianum Controversy From Antiquity To The Present*;
Alice Whealey

The *Testimonium Flavianum* is presented below from the 1737 translation by William Whiston:

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 receive 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 alive 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.

- *Antiquity of the Jews*, Book XVIII; Flavius Josephus, translation by William Whiston

A more recent translation of the *Testimonium*, from the *Loeb Classical Library*, is as follows:

About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not cease. On the third day he appeared to them restored to life. For the prophets of God had prophesied these and myriads of other marvelous things about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still up to now, not disappeared.

- *Loeb Classical Library*, vol. 9, pp. 49ff, translation by I. H. Feldman

There are three basic positions taken on this passage, shown on the following page:

- The passage is completely authentic and was written by Josephus. (This is a very small minority position.)
- The passage is partly authentic. Josephus wrote something about Jesus, but later Christians altered it. (This is the favored position by Christian apologists. This position may be the majority view at this time.)
- The passage is completely inauthentic and the entire thing was added later by Christians (or someone else). (This is a widely held position. It has been the majority view in the past, but may not be the majority view at present. This is my position.)

In order for the *Testimonium* to have value as a verification for the existence of Jesus two things need to be true:

1. The *Testimonium*, or at least a meaningful portion of it, needs to have been written by Josephus himself.
2. Josephus needs to have been an independent witness to the information contained in the *Testimonium* or to have used a source which was an independent witness to this information, i.e. if Josephus did write it, but he based his information on a Gospel or another Christian source, then it is of no value in supporting the existence of "Jesus."

What I argue, based on the evidence, is that it's most likely that this entire passage is a later addition by someone else, and that if it wasn't added later in full and Josephus did write something about Jesus here, then his source was the Christian story and therefore it doesn't provide any corroborating evidence for the existence of Jesus anyway.

First let's look at the Christian defense of the *Testimonium*.

Almost no scholars maintain that the entire *Testimonium* is authentic. The primary reason that the *Testimonium* is viewed as problematic and likely to be wholly or partly inauthentic is the fact that so much of what is said in the *Testimonium* is clearly very Christian in nature and really couldn't have been said by a conservative Jew like Josephus. Primarily, calling Jesus "the Messiah" is something that only a Christian would do. The passage is so favorable to Jesus that one can hardly imagine anyone but a Christian writing it, for if one believed these things they would surely be a Christian themselves. Jewish scholars have doubted the authenticity of the passage since the Middle Ages, and by the 16th century Christian scholars also began to doubt the authenticity of the text. The passage has been a source of controversy ever since.

Because of the nature of the passage it is almost universally rejected as authentic, even by Christians. If the passage is wholly authentic, in fact, then it is certainly based on Christian sources and is therefore definitely not an independent witness to the existence of Jesus, and thus it does nothing to establish his existence.

The recognition of this fact by some of the more sophisticated Christian apologists is why some of them argue against its total authenticity. Some Christian apologists argue against the authenticity of the *Testimonium* for reasons of intellectual honesty, and others because

they are attempting to position the *Testimonium* as a potentially authentic corroboration of the existence of Jesus, which requires that parts of it be inauthentic.

Taking the overwhelming majority position that the passage is at least partially inauthentic, let us now consider the defense of the passage as partly authentic.

Of those people who argue that the *Testimonium* is partly authentic, there are two basic arguments:

- Later Christians added to what Josephus had written.
- Later Christians deleted portions of what Josephus had written, and perhaps also made some additional changes as well.

First we will deal with the argument for deletions. The argument that later Christians deleted portions of what Josephus had written is less common than that later Christians simply added to what he had written, but this argument has significant implications. If one takes the *Testimonium* in its current form as something that was only added to by Christians, then any original passage would have at least been neutral to Jesus, if not still positive towards him. Many Christian apologists and scholars recognize that it's very unlikely that this would be the case, and that if it were the case then it almost certainly would mean that Josephus got his information from Christian sources and therefore this wouldn't be an independent attestation to Jesus even if a portion of it were authentic.

Because of this, some people have attempted to rescue the passage by proposing that what Josephus had originally written was negative towards Jesus and Christianity, and that this is why later Christians altered the text. A hostile reference towards Jesus is seen as the most likely type of reference that would be both authentic and independent, so this proposal has appeal to scholars who seek to maintain that this passage offers evidence for the existence of a real historical Jesus.

Frederick F. Bruce, a leading modern evangelical scholar during the later portion of the 20th century, was one of the primary advocates of the claim that the *Testimonium* was originally hostile and later Christians deleted portions of it. His theoretical reconstruction of the passage is as follows:

Now there arose at this time **a source of further trouble** in one Jesus, a wise man who performed surprising works, a teacher of men who gladly welcome **strange things**. He led away many Jews, and also many of the Gentiles. He was the **so-called** Christ. When Pilate, acting on information supplied by the chief men around us, condemned him to the cross, those who had attached themselves to him at first did not cease **to cause trouble**, and the tribe of Christians, which has taken this name from him is not extinct even today.

- *Jesus and Christian Origins outside the New Testament*; F.F. Bruce, 1974

Of this reconstruction F.F. Bruce had the following to say:

The flavor of this rendering probably expresses Josephus' intention more closely. It includes four emendations, which [appear in bold] above. The first one, suggested by Robert Eisler, is the addition of the phrase 'a source of further trouble' in the first sentence. This links the paragraph more naturally to what has gone before, for Josephus has been narrating various troubles which arose during Pilate's Governorship. The second one, suggested by H.ST.J.Thackeray, is the reading 'strange things' (gk. aethe) instead of 'true things' (gk. alethe). To Josephus, Christianity was certainly more strange than true. The third one, suggested by G.C.Richards and R.J.H.Shutt, is the insertion of 'so-called' before 'Christ'... Some reference to our Lord's designation as 'Christ' is required at this point; otherwise Josephus' readers might not understand how in fact the 'tribe of Christians' got its name from Jesus. The fourth, is not an emendation in the same sense as the others. Josephus says that Jesus disciples 'did not cease', and we have to ask, 'Did not cease to do what?' the answer will be in accordance with the context, and in the kind of context we envisage, 'did not cease to cause trouble' makes good sense.

- *Jesus and Christian Origins outside the New Testament*, F.F Bruce, 1974

The problem is, however, that this is all complete speculation and there isn't any evidence to support it. Yes, if we suppose that Josephus were to write about Jesus, this proposal by F.F. Bruce does perhaps sound plausible, but writing things that we think Josephus could have said had he chosen to write about this topic, assuming that he even knew who Jesus was, isn't the point. We can all sit around proposing what hundreds of people "might" have written about Jesus, but that isn't evidence, that's just us making things up, and that's all that F.F. Bruce is doing here, engaging in a bit of fancy.

His argument is also full of circular reasoning. He assumes from the start that Josephus knows something about Jesus and Christianity, but if this passage isn't authentic then Josephus likely knows nothing about him or the religion. As we will see when looking at the other supposed reference to Jesus Christ in the writings of Josephus, this passage is the only potential writing of Josephus that can establish his knowledge of Jesus and Christianity. You can't use the passage in question to establish his knowledge of Jesus, when in fact he may well have known nothing at all about him, and thus none of the opinions that Bruce attributes to Josephus can be presumed.

It's quite clear that this is an attempt to salvage the passage based on speculation, wishful thinking, and a presumption that Josephus knows about Jesus and Christianity, the only evidence for which is this very passage.

The other defense of the *Testimonium* states that what Josephus originally wrote was not

hostile towards Jesus or Christianity and that the current version of the passage is basically what Josephus wrote, but that later Christians added to it or slightly altered it. This has been proposed by several people, and is at least based on more than just speculation, as in the case of F.F. Bruce's proposal.

J.P. Meier, among others, has proposed a potential reconstruction of the *Testimonium*. Meier's proposal, in *A Marginal Jew*, as shown below. The portions in bold are those that Meier suggests were added by later Christians and should be excluded from the passage in order to see its original content.

About 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.

There have been a variety of proposed reconstructions of the passage, all of which vary slightly, but follow these same general lines. The reason for removing these sections can easily be seen, they are the parts that seem impossible for a non-Christian to have written. What is the basis for excluding these passages however? Just the very fact that they seem impossible for a non-Christian to have written them, and the fact that they would obviously come from Christian sources if they were originally written by Josephus.

Again, this is a case of simply sanitizing the passage to make its writing by Josephus plausible, but once again we have no evidence to support most of these speculations, we have only that - speculations.

The passage as we have it in all of our copies of *Antiquity of the Jews* comes down to us from a manuscript that was quoted by the 4th century Christian historian Eusebius, however there are other references to this same passage from other writers shortly after the time of Eusebius' first use of the passage which quote the passage differently. We have three other primary references to the passage that differ from what we have today and what Eusebius quoted. Some apologists for the passage propose that these quotes are "closer to the original" than the source that Eusebius quoted from and the source that spawned the copies that have come down to us. There are two Roman references, one by Ambrose and one by Jerome, and also an Arabic reference by Agapios.

The two Roman references also come from the 4th century, after Eusebius, and the Arabic

reference comes from a 9th or 10th century work.

The quotation of the *Testimonium* by Jerome is as follows:

Josephus in the 18th book of Antiquities, most expressly acknowledges that Christ was slain by the pharisees, on account of the greatness of his miracles.... Now he wrote concerning our Lord after this manner: "At the same time there was Jesus, a wise man, if yet it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of those who willingly receive the truth. He had many followers both of the Jews and of the Gentiles -- **he was believed to be the Christ**. And when by the envy of our principal men, Pilate had condemned him to the cross, yet notwithstanding those who had loved him at first persevered, for he appeared to them alive on the third day, as the oracles of the prophets had foretold many of these and other wonderful things concerning him: and the sect of Christians so named from him are not extinct to this day."

Some people claim that this quotation by Jerome is basically an exact copy what Josephus originally wrote, but most scholars also conclude that even this is not accurate, and even this would have been unlikely to have been written by Josephus. This would indicate at least two potential variants of interpolations to the text, the one quoted by Eusebius and the one by Jerome, but Ambrose also references the *Testimonium* in the 4th century, and his quotation of it is different still, leaving out the reference to Christ altogether, providing us now with three variants.

In addition to these, we have an Arabic paraphrase of the passage in the 9th or 10th century work of Agapios, in which Agapios is discussing Jesus. Agapios' version of the passage is as follows:

Similarly Josephus the Hebrew. For he says in the treatises that he has written on the governance of the Jews: At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the 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 after his crucifixion and that he was alive; accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.

There is even more speculation and debate about this reference. Many Christian scholars, such as J.P. Meier, believe that this recounting of the passage by Agapios is ultimately sourced from a version of the *Testimonium* that is the same as our current version of it, but that here Agapios says that he was "*perhaps the Messiah*" because of the Islamic culture in

which Agapios was writing, and that this does not reflect the sourcing of this passage from a version of the *Testimonium* that complies with Jerome's quotation. Thus this passage from Agapios doesn't really add much to the *Testimonium* discussion.

The biggest problem with all of these other references to the *Testimonium* is not only that they all also come after the 3rd century, but they are all also almost exactly like what we currently have today, with the only real variation being the passage about "Christ". Ambrose's reference leaves the passage about Christ out completely, Jerome says that he was "believed to be" the Christ, and Agapios says "perhaps" he was the Messiah.

Everything else, however, all of the other pieces of the passage which scholars have long agreed upon as incompatible with having been written by Josephus, are all there. So even with these passages we still have not arrived at a "sanitized" version of the *Testimonium* that would likely have been written by Josephus.

There isn't any existing reference to the *Testimonium* that fully complies with the proposals like those made by J.P. Meier, of a *Testimonium* that lacks claims what could really only have come from a Christian source.

This leaves us with two real possibilities for which there is evidence: Either the entire *Testimonium* was inserted into the text some time in the 3rd or 4th century by someone else, or the versions by Ambrose or Jerome do essentially represent what Josephus really wrote.

If Josephus really did write something like what Jerome states that he wrote, then his source for the information was certainly Christian, and thus the reference is not an independent account of the existence of Jesus, it's merely Josephus passing on the Christian story. This would still be somewhat significant, as it would at least show that Jews were aware of the story of Jesus at this time outside of the Christian community and that the story was believed and viewed as worth a minor mention, but that's about all that this would show. Based on Josephus' other writings his attestation to miracles is hardly reliable, for Josephus recounts the occurrence of dozens of miracles in his works, from armies in the clouds to prophecies and signs of doom. Obviously Josephus believed that these types of things could happen and believed many common myths of his time, though his belief in the resurrection of the dead is not supported by his other writings.

The question here is not whether Josephus would record miracles as facts, we know he did that, but that he would record these specific miracles in the way that this passage states them, because this would indicate that "Jesus really was the Messiah", something which Josephus obviously didn't believe. In fact, aside from this and the other passage we will look at, there are no other mentions of a Messiah in the works of Josephus at all.

Now that we have seen the defense of the *Testimonium Flavianum* as fully or partly authentic, let's look at the arguments for why the *Testimonium* should be considered a complete insertion into the text by a different author.

Points against authenticity are as follows:

- The passage contains overtly Christian content
- The overall passage is positive towards Jesus, even if the overtly Christian parts are removed
- The passage interrupts the continuity of the writing
- Jesus is not mentioned in the Table of Contents
- There are stylistic variations from Josephus' style
- The passage is not referenced by anyone prior to Eusebius in the 4th century
- The section on Pilate is similar to another section on Pilate in Josephus' earlier writing *The Jewish War*, which does not contain the Jesus reference
- Josephus never wrote anything else about Jesus
- The reference is quite small considering the subject matter, and the fact that Josephus wrote more about John the Baptist and other "false prophets"
- Full insertion of the paragraph is more likely than multiple different alterations

These arguments are quite significant, and you will notice that the arguments against authenticity typically deal with the works of Josephus in a more holistic manner than the arguments for authenticity, which tend to focus on just the passage itself.

To evaluate the passage we must first consider the *Testimonium* in context. The *Testimonium* appears in Book 18 of *Antiquity of the Jews*. It is presented in context below, with the *Testimonium* itself highlighted in bold.

1. But now Pilate, the procurator of Judea, removed the army from Cesarea to Jerusalem, to take their winter quarters there, in order to abolish the Jewish laws. So he introduced Caesar's effigies, which were upon the ensigns, and brought them into the city; whereas our law forbids us the very making of images; on which account the former procurators were wont to make their entry into the city with such ensigns as had not those ornaments. Pilate was the first who brought those images to Jerusalem, and set them up there; which was done without the knowledge of the people, because it was done in the night time; but as soon as they knew it, they came in multitudes to Cesarea, and interceded with Pilate many days that he would remove the images; and when he would not grant their requests, because it would tend to the injury of Caesar, while yet they persevered in their request, on the sixth day he ordered his soldiers to have their weapons privately, while he came and sat upon his judgment-seat, which seat was so prepared in the open place of the city, that it concealed the army that lay ready to oppress them; and when the Jews petitioned him again, he gave a signal to the soldiers to encompass them routed, and threatened that their punishment should be no less than immediate death, unless they would leave off disturbing him, and go their ways home. But they threw themselves upon the ground, and laid

their necks bare, and said they would take their death very willingly, rather than the wisdom of their laws should be transgressed; upon which Pilate was deeply affected with their firm resolution to keep their laws inviolable, and presently commanded the images to be carried back from Jerusalem to Cesarea.

2. But Pilate undertook to bring a current of water to Jerusalem, and did it with the sacred money, and derived the origin of the stream from the distance of two hundred furlongs. However, the Jews were not pleased with what had been done about this water; and many ten thousands of the people got together, and made a clamor against him, and insisted that he should leave off that design. Some of them also used reproaches, and abused the man, as crowds of such people usually do. So he habited a great number of his soldiers in their habit, who carried daggers under their garments, and sent them to a place where they might surround them. So he bid the Jews himself go away; but they boldly casting reproaches upon him, he gave the soldiers that signal which had been beforehand agreed on; who laid upon them much greater blows than Pilate had commanded them, and equally punished those that were tumultuous, and those that were not; nor did they spare them in the least: and since the people were unarmed, and were caught by men prepared for what they were about, there were a great number of them slain by this means, and others of them ran away wounded. And thus an end was put to this sedition.

3. 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 receive 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 alive 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.

4. About the same time also another sad calamity put the Jews into disorder, and certain shameful practices happened about the temple of Isis that was at Rome. I will now first take notice of the wicked attempt about the temple of Isis, and will then give an account of the Jewish affairs. There was at Rome a woman whose name was Paulina; one who, on account of the dignity of her ancestors, and by the regular conduct of a virtuous life, had a great reputation: she was also very rich; and although she was of a beautiful countenance, and in

that flower of her age wherein women are the most gay, yet did she lead a life of great modesty.

- *Antiquity of the Jews*, Book XVIII; Flavius Josephus, 94-100 CE

The first thing that you should notice is that the passage about Jesus interrupts the flow of the writing. Paragraph 2 leads into paragraph 4, while paragraph 3 is an interruption that goes off on a tangent that is not related to the subject at hand. This alone is a pretty significant piece of evidence, however it has been countered with the statement that Josephus did sometimes interrupt his train of thought with digressions. Nevertheless, this is a significant point against authenticity. The paragraph about Jesus could be removed from the text and no loss would be apparent, indeed the text would appear to be more consistent. The paragraph on Jesus adds nothing to the rest of the work.

In addition to this, each book in *Antiquity of the Jews* has a detailed Tables of Contents, that mentions the details of the subjects contained in each chapter. The passage on Jesus, despite being quite important in it's content, is not listed in the book summary. Given the content of the *Testimonium*, it is quite peculiar that there is no mention of Jesus in the Table of Contents. A mention of someone who is the Messiah, or who is believed to have been the Messiah, and who is claimed to have risen from the dead and been a worker of wonderful works, etc., would surely warrant a mention one would think, even for a non-Christian audience, however this is not the case. The Table of Contents was probably added by a scribe at a later date, some time before the quotation of the *Testimonium* by Eusebius. The Table of Contents for book 18 is as follows:

These are the things contained in the eighteenth [volume] of the histories of the Jewish antiquities by Josephus:

How Quirinius was sent by Caesar as an assessor of Syria and Judea and custodian of the estate of Archelaus.

How Coponius, from the order of the knights, was sent as prefect of Judea.

How Judas the Galilean persuaded the multitude not to register their estates, until Joazar the high priest persuaded them rather to submit to the Romans.

Certain sects, even as many of the philosophers among the Jews, and certain laws.

How Herod and Philip the tetrarchs created cities for the honor of Caesar.

How Samaritans threw the bones of dead men into the temple and defiled the people for seven days.

How Salome the sister of Herod died and left her possessions to Julia the wife of Caesar.

How Pontius Pilate wished to bear busts of Caesar secretly into Jerusalem, and the people did not accept this, and rebelled.

What happened to the Jews in Rome at this time under the Samaritans.

An accusation of Pilate by Samaritans in the time of Vitellius, and how Vitellius compelled him to go up to Rome to give account for what he had done. The war and defeat of Herod the tetrarch against Aretas the king of the Arabs. How Tiberius Caesar wrote to Vitellius to persuade Artabanus the Parthian to send him hostages, and to make war against Aretas. The death of Philip, and how his tetrarchy became a prefecture. The sailing away of Agrippa to Rome, and how he was bound after having been accused by his own freedman; in what manner he was set free by Gaius upon the death of Tiberius and became king of the tetrarchy of Philip. How Herod went up to Rome and was banished, and how Gaius gifted his tetrarchy to Agrippa. The strife of the Jews and Greeks in Alexandria and the embassy from each to Gaius. Accusation of the Jews by Apion and of the fellow ambassadors for not having a statue of Caesar. How Gaius became irritated and sends Petronius the leader of Syria to make war against the Jews, unless they wish to receive his statue. The destruction that happened to the Jews in Babylon on account of the brothers Asineus and Anileus.

The book encompasses a time span of 32 years.

- Translation from the Greek by Ben C. Smith

The fact that the *Testimonium* is highly favorable to Jesus as we have it, and at least neutral, if not still positive, towards Jesus in any reconstructed form that does not intentionally insert speculative hostile comments, is also a significant mark against the authenticity of the passage. This is made clear when one considers that every other reference that Josephus made to people who were executed by Romans was quite negative. Josephus was a Jew who was opposed to the apocalyptic and messianic movements of his day, and in addition to this he was writing *Antiquity of the Jews* for the Romans. Josephus had every reason to portray people who were condemned under the Romans as bad people who were justly executed. In the *Testimonium*, however, Josephus would not only be implicating Jews, but the Romans as well, in the wrongful execution of a good person. This is inconsistent with everything else Josephus has written.

Several linguistic variations are also reported by scholars, but these are countered by scholars who favor authenticity by claiming that there are significant stylistic consistencies with Josephus as well.

Until the reference to the *Testimonium* passage by Eusebius in 324 we have no other references to the passage, even by Christian apologists who had otherwise referenced

works of Josephus, some of whom had referenced *Antiquity of the Jews* specifically, and even book 18.

Michael Hardwick reports in *Josephus as an Historical Source in Patristic Literature through Eusebius*, that Justin Martyr, Theophilus Antiochenus, Melito of Sardis, Minucius Felix, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Julius Africanus, Pseudo-Justin, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Origen, Methodius, and Lactantius all fail to make any reference to the *Testimonium* despite their demonstrated familiarity with the works of Josephus and their defense of Christianity and Jesus.

This means that if the *Testimonium* were original in any form resembling what we have today, that it existed in a widely read work for over 200 years without ever being mentioned. In addition to this, it would have been, as far as we know, the only positive or neutral attestation to Jesus outside of Christian writings during this time.

Most significant, perhaps, is the fact that Origen did reference passages from *Antiquity of the Jews* some time between 230 and 250, in his work *Against Celsus*, yet he never mentioned the *Testimonium*. Here are Origen's references to *Antiquity of the Jews*:

I would like to say to Celsus, who represents the Jew as accepting somehow John as a Baptist, who baptized Jesus, that the existence of John the Baptist, baptizing for the remission of sins, is related by one who lived no great length of time after John and Jesus. For in the 18th book of his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus bears witness to John as having been a Baptist, and as promising purification to those who underwent the rite. Now this writer, although not believing in Jesus as the Christ, in seeking after the cause of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, whereas he ought to have said that the conspiracy against Jesus was the cause of these calamities befalling the people, since they put to death Christ, who was a prophet, says nevertheless-being, although against his will, not far from the truth-that these disasters happened to the Jews as a punishment for the death of James the Just, who was a brother of Jesus (called Christ),-the Jews having put him to death, although he was a man most distinguished for his justice. Paul, a genuine disciple of Jesus, says that he regarded this James as a brother of the Lord, not so much on account of their relationship by blood, or of their being brought up together, as because of his virtue and doctrine

- *Against Celsus*; Origen

This short passage raises many issues. The first issue is Origen's apparent reference to "*the 18th book of his Antiquities*", which is the book that both the *Testimonium* is currently in and Josephus' discussion of John the Baptist is in. Scholar Louis Feldman states that "*the 18th book of his Antiquities*" is not in the original texts of Origen, and claims that this is a later interpolation. This would not be surprising, but it is an important issue because this would confirm absolutely that Origen had read the 18th book, which would make his

complete avoidance of the *Testimonium* unexplainable by anything other than the fact that it was not there at all when he read it.

Even though the phrase "*the 18th book of his Antiquities*" may be an interpolation, his discussion of John the Baptist still indicates that he probably did read the 18th book, which still brings us to the question of how Origen could have read the 18th book and never made any comment about the *Testimonium* passage, either right here or in any of his other works. It seems highly unlikely to say the least.

There are other things to consider here as well however. Origen states that Josephus didn't believe that Jesus was the Christ, which contradicts the current version of the *Testimonium*, and neither the versions of the *Testimonium* cited by Jerome or Ambrose lend support the Origen's statement. Origen also states that Josephus attributed the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE to the execution of James, who Origen believes is "James the Just", and he ponders why this would be the case instead of attributing the destruction of Jerusalem to the execution of Jesus himself. This is quite a confusing issue, because Origen is getting confused here and talking about things that don't appear in any works of Josephus that we have. (This will be discussed in a moment)

Origen then goes on to attribute a reference to "*Jesus (called Christ)*" to Josephus, which now appears in book 20 of *Antiquity of the Jews*. What Origen wrote about James does not correspond to what is written in book 20 however, thus it is very uncertain that Origen had actually read this book, and perhaps he was working from secondary sources, or he got his sources confused.

We have to understand Origen's perspective here, and know that he is attributing his views to Josephus, even though Josephus likely would have had no idea what Origen was talking about. We will address the passage in book 20 that refers to Jesus, the brother of James, soon, but for now it must be said that this passage does not say anything about "James the Just" and is probably not even talking about anything related to Christianity, this is just a mistake made by Origen.

At any rate, what we get from this passage by Origen is an example of someone who was using the works of Josephus to make a defense of the reputation and legacy of Jesus Christ, and who makes no mention of the *Testimonium*, despite appearing to be familiar with information in book 18. This is indeed very difficult to explain if the *Testimonium* existed at that time in either a positive or neutral tone. Even if it were negative it would probably have warranted some discussion by Origen, if not here then at least in some other work. If there were a "negative *Testimonium*" it's highly likely that Origen or someone else would have addressed it, exactly because of the fact that *Antiquity of the Jews* was such a highly regarded and widely read work. The apologetic argument that early apologists would have ignored a negative or neutral *Testimonium* simply doesn't hold weight, and that they would have passed over the only positive or neutral reference to Jesus outside of their own works is also unbelievable, especially since Origen is here going to pains to make something out of what he believes is a much more benign reference to Jesus by Josephus.

Another issue with the *Testimonium* is the fact that much of what is in *Antiquity of the Jews* is very similar to what Josephus had written in his earlier work, *The Jewish War*, which was about the war of 66-70 CE during which Judea was destroyed, and the events leading up to it. Below is the section of *The Jewish War* that discusses the reign of Pilate.

2. Now Pilate, who was sent as procurator into Judea by Tiberius, sent by night those images of Caesar that are called ensigns into Jerusalem. This excited a very among great tumult among the Jews when it was day; for those that were near them were astonished at the sight of them, as indications that their laws were trodden under foot; for those laws do not permit any sort of image to be brought into the city. Nay, besides the indignation which the citizens had themselves at this procedure, a vast number of people came running out of the country. These came zealously to Pilate to Cesarea, and besought him to carry those ensigns out of Jerusalem, and to reserve them their ancient laws inviolable; but upon Pilate's denial of their request, they fell down prostrate upon the ground, and continued immovable in that posture for five days and as many nights.

3. On the next day Pilate sat upon his tribunal, in the open market-place, and called to him the multitude, as desirous to give them an answer; and then gave a signal to the soldiers, that they should all by agreement at once encompass the Jews with their weapons; so the band of soldiers stood round about the Jews in three ranks. The Jews were under the utmost consternation at that unexpected sight. Pilate also said to them that they should be cut in pieces, unless they would admit of Caesar's images, and gave intimation to the soldiers to draw their naked swords. Hereupon the Jews, as it were at one signal, fell down in vast numbers together, and exposed their necks bare, and cried out that they were sooner ready to be slain, than that their law should be transgressed. Hereupon Pilate was greatly surprised at their prodigious superstition, and gave order that the ensigns should be presently carried out of Jerusalem.

4. After this he raised another disturbance, by expending that sacred treasure which is called Corban upon aqueducts, whereby he brought water from the distance of four hundred furlongs. At this the multitude had indignation; and when Pilate was come to Jerusalem, they came about his tribunal, and made a clamor at it. Now when he was apprized aforehand of this disturbance, he mixed his own soldiers in their armor with the multitude, and ordered them to conceal themselves under the habits of private men, and not indeed to use their swords, but with their staves to beat those that made the clamor. He then gave the signal from his tribunal [to do as he had bidden them]. Now the Jews were so sadly beaten, that

many of them perished by the stripes they received, and many of them perished as trodden to death by themselves; by which means the multitude was astonished at the calamity of those that were slain, and held their peace.

- *The Jewish War*, Book II; Josephus

In this work, written around 75 CE, there is no mention of Jesus Christ. This lends support to both the view that the *Testimonium* was a later insertion by someone else, or that if Josephus did write it then his source was Christian and developed after the dissemination of the Gospels. It is also significant here that Josephus is talking about disturbances in Judea, and interactions between the Romans and Jews in relation to disturbances, but he makes no mention of the Roman execution of a Jewish rebel, blasphemer, prophet, or self-proclaimed "King of the Jews". If the Gospel account of the death of Jesus were true, then surely the event would have merited some mention here, would it not?

Indeed there are several places in Josephus' other works that one would expect Josephus to mention Jesus if he had indeed been aware of him and written the *Testimonium*. For example, in his autobiography Josephus wrote about the religious quests of his youth in which he named all of the religious sects in Judea and his investigations into them, yet he made no mention of Jesus or Christianity. This part of his life took place between 53 and 56 CE.

And when I was about sixteen years old, I had a mind to make trim of the several sects that were among us. These sects are three: - The first is that of the Pharisees, the second that Sadducees, and the third that of the Essens, as we have frequently told you; for I thought that by this means I might choose the best, if I were once acquainted with them all; so I contented myself with hard fare, and underwent great difficulties, and went through them all. Nor did I content myself with these trials only; but when I was informed that one, whose name was Banus, lived in the desert, and used no other clothing than grew upon trees, and had no other food than what grew of its own accord, and bathed himself in cold water frequently, both by night and by day, in order to preserve his chastity, I imitated him in those things, and continued with him three years. So when I had accomplished my desires, I returned back to the city, being now nineteen years old, and began to conduct myself according to the rules of the sect of the Pharisees, which is of kin to the sect of the Stoics, as the Greeks call them.

- *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, Josephus, 94-99 CE

It has to be recognized that the *Testimonium* is quite short, and given the nature of what it says, it would be astonishing that Josephus would make such a short commentary. We are, after all, talking about a miracle working wise man, who had many followers, was executed and came back to life, and was at least considered to be "the Messiah". Why would Josephus relegate all of this to a few sentences and then never say anything else

about it, either in *Antiquity of the Jews* itself or in his other works? Furthermore, why would Josephus never explain what a messiah is?

The answer to all this makes much more sense if we consider that Josephus never heard of Jesus Christ at all.

With all of this we then have to ask how it is that the *Testimonium* came into existence? The proposals by those who claim that Josephus wrote some part of the *Testimonium*, but that later Christians altered it, all require multiple changes to the text (aside from the proposal of just changing the statement on Christ from "he was proclaimed to be" to "he was"). If the text is different today from what Josephus wrote, then I would argue that the simplest and most likely alteration is the full insertion of the entire *Testimonium* itself by someone else at a later date.

For a long time this was believed to be the case, indeed it was Protestant reformers in the late Renaissance and Enlightenment who proposed this and proscribed to it, but they proposed that the Catholic Church historian Eusebius intentionally inserted the passage in an effort of deception. This is important to note, because it is important to recognize that the belief that Eusebius inserted this passage was intentionally a claim that was made by anti-Catholic Protestants, it is not a recent claim of religious skeptics. Nevertheless, because of the fact that this claim has been well established in the literature for centuries, it is still the most widely discussed possibility for a full insertion.

This claim really has little merit however, and is unlikely. The much more likely scenario, and I argue the most likely scenario for how this passage came to be, is that the *Testimonium* is a marginal or interlinear note that was accidentally incorporated into the text. This is actually the most common way that ancient texts got corrupted, and the passage has all the hallmarks of a note.

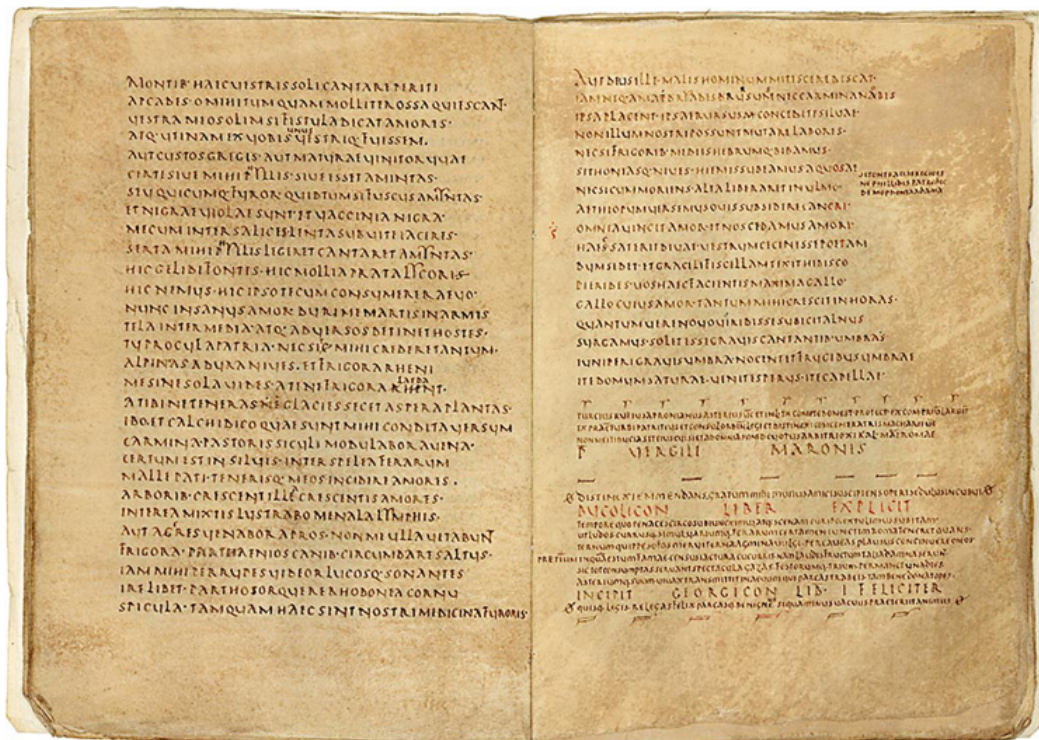
To understand how this type of thing happens you need to understand ancient manuscripts. This work would have been written on unbound media, such as scrolls, but the process was essentially the same as the later usage of bound books. The texts were written on pages with wide margins on the sides, and the margins were used to make notes and corrections. When owners of the texts studied them they would make notes in the margins, but when scribes of the texts copied them, they would also make corrections in the margins. Many times the margins got quite messy and mistakes were made when later scribes went to copy the texts. Later scribes were supposed to read the margins and then make any corrections that were indicated there in the copies that they made. Thus, if an earlier scribe accidentally left out a passage and instead appended it in the margins, the later scribe was supposed to incorporate that passage in the body of the copy that he was making.

To get an idea of this we can look at some examples of manuscripts. The following examples, though of more recent texts, demonstrate how manuscripts were used and copied.



MS 593

Aristophanes: Plutus and The Clouds. Possibly Crete, 2nd half of 15th c.



MS 5283

Vergil: Bucolicum & Georgicon. Italy, 1771

What we see here are different examples of marginal and interlinear notes. The issue is that sometimes people made commentaries or personal notes in the margins and sometimes they made corrections, but later scribes often couldn't distinguish between the two, so sometimes notes got incorporated as corrections.

In this way later notes got written into the text as if they were a part of the original.

I contend that this is the most likely explanation for the *Testimonium* passage.

At this point we can only speculate, but I propose this scenario:

Someone, either a Christian of Jewish heritage or a non-Christian, in the 2nd or 3rd century was reading the section on Pilate and added a marginal note about Jesus at the location where he thought Jesus would have fit into the timeline of history. The person may have read the passage and thought, "oh this is where Jesus came along," and added a note accordingly. The *Testimonium* passage appropriately starts out, "*About this time there lived Jesus...*". This is exactly what one would expect to find in a note. Some later scribe then thought that this note was supposed to be part of the text and incorporated it into the work. Later variations on the "Christ" sentence could have occurred from that point on, but the bulk of the *Testimonium* was simply inserted in full.

From that point on the copies of *Antiquity of the Jews* that contained this passage were the ones most likely to have been used and copied by Christians, thus a form of "natural selection" took place, selecting for the preservation of copies that contained this passage over ones that didn't.

This is what the evidence suggests. We don't have any evidence of a small neutral passage that could have reasonably been written by Josephus, and we have no evidence for a hostile passage. The only evidence that we have is evidence from absence of for the first 200+ years of the existence of *Antiquity of the Jews*, and then evidence for the existence of the full fledged passage. That the *Testimonium* was a marginal note which got integrated into the text explains why the *Testimonium* is short, dense, interrupts the flow of the text, is not in the Table of Contents, is not mentioned in *The Jewish War*, and why Josephus never wrote anything else about Jesus Christ, and it is the only explanation that does explain all of these things.

Almost all of the apologetic attempts to rescue the passage rely on the existence of some intermediate passage that could have been written by Josephus, but there is no evidence that any such passage ever existed. We only have reasonable evidence to suggest that the passage was not there and evidence of the passage basically as we see it today, we have no evidence for anything in between.

That doesn't mean that it's impossible that Josephus wrote something small and neutral originally, but based on the evidence we have full insertion by the innocent incorporation of a note seems the most likely origin of the *Testimonium Flavianum*. The (distant) second most likely scenario based on the evidence, I contend, is that Josephus wrote the entire passage himself basically as we see it today, in which case his source was certainly the

Christian story itself, and thus even if Josephus did write it he certainly isn't a witness to anything other than the story of Jesus, not Jesus himself.

Both of these most likely scenarios preclude the *Testimonium Flavianum* from being evidence for the existence of Jesus. We know that Josephus couldn't have been a personal witness anyway, he was born in 37 CE.

Within the past 50 years, and especially the past 20 years, there has been a growing defense of the *Testimonium Flavianum* and growing attempts to salvage at least some part of it as "original". Today the majority opinion in scholarship is that some part of the *Testimonium Flavianum* is original, but the growing defense of the *Testimonium* is a product of the growing challenge to the historical existence of Jesus. Originally almost all Protestants regarded the *Testimonium* as a complete fraud, but this was before the idea that Jesus was a complete myth existed. As the challenge to the existence of Jesus has grown defenders of Jesus have had to look around for supporting evidence, and now the *Testimonium Flavianum* is really the one and only potential corroborating statement for the existence of Jesus Christ, so there have been renewed efforts to defend it. Hence all of the proposals, based purely on speculation, about possible "acceptable" versions of it that could have been written by Josephus, but there is no evidence for any such versions, just wishful thinking.

The only remaining possible non-Christian attestation to the existence of Jesus Christ, then, is the passing mention of "*the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James,*" in *Antiquity of the Jews*, so let us now take a look at that.

First let's take a look at the passage in question:

1. And now Caesar, upon hearing the death of Festus, sent Albinus into Judea, as procurator. But the king deprived Joseph of the high priesthood, and bestowed the succession to that dignity on the son of Ananus, who was also himself called Ananus. Now the report goes that this eldest Ananus proved a most fortunate man; for he had five sons who had all performed the office of a high priest to God, and who had himself enjoyed that dignity a long time formerly, which had never happened to any other of our high priests. But this younger Ananus, who, as we have told you already, took the high priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews, as we have already observed; when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority]. **Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of 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: but as for those who seemed the

most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done; they also sent to the king [Agrippa], desiring him to send to Ananus that he should act so no more, for that what he had already done was not to be justified; nay, some of them went also to meet Albinus, as he was upon his journey from Alexandria, and informed him that it was not lawful for Ananus to assemble a sanhedrim without his consent. Whereupon Albinus complied with what they said, and wrote in anger to Ananus, and threatened that he would bring him to punishment for what he had done; **on which king Agrippa took the high priesthood from him, when he had ruled but three months, and made Jesus, the son of Damneus, high priest.**

- *Antiquity of the Jews*, Book XX; Flavius Josephus, 94-100 CE

What is important to note here is that this is a passage that is definitely talking about at least one Jesus, the son of Damneus. Indeed, the name "Jesus" was quite common at the time. In fact the whole issue of the name of Jesus is quite confusing, because Jesus and Joshua are really two different interpretations of the exact same Hebrew name. "Jesus" is the English form of the Latin form of the Greek translation of Yeshu'a, while Joshua is the direct English translation of Yeshu'a, without going through the Greek variant. So, in reality Jesus and Joshua are the exact same name, or would have been the exact same name as far as Jews were concerned, because to them both of these names would have been Yeshu'a.

That's not critically important here, but what is important is the fact that both "Jesus" and "James" (in their Greek and Hebrew forms) were extremely common names at the time. Indeed there are at least 19 or so "Jesuses" listed between the Bible and the works of Josephus. Josephus himself lists about 14.

1. Jesus son of Naue (Joshua of Nun)
2. Jesus son of Saul
3. Jesus, high priest, son of Phineas
4. Jesus son of the high priest Jozadak
5. Jesus son of Joiada
6. Jesus, high priest, son of Simon
7. Jesus, high priest, son of Phabes
8. Jesus, high priest, son of See
9. Jesus, high priest, son of Sirach (writer of *Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach*)
10. Jesus Christ
11. Jesus son of Damnaeus, became high priest
12. Jesus son of Gamaliel, became high priest
13. Jesus son of high priest Sapphas and military general
14. Jesus, chief priest, probably to be identified with 10 or 11
15. Jesus son of Gamalas, high priest
16. Jesus, brigand chief on borderland of Ptolemais

17. Jesus son of Sapphias
18. Jesus brother of Chares
19. Jesus a Galilean, perhaps to be identified with 15
20. Jesus in ambushade, perhaps to be identified with 16
21. Jesus, priest, son of Thebuti
22. Jesus, son of Ananias, rude peasant, prophesies the fall of Jerusalem.

Of the 28 high priests between the reign of King Herod the Great and the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, four of them were named Jesus.

So, it's important here to understand that both Jesus and James were very popular names, and that the mere coupling of these names by themselves would not in any way identify a Jesus as the same Jesus who is the subject of the Gospels; one has to consider the passage and the subject of the writing.

This chapter is discussing events that were taking place around 60 CE, some time between about 60 and 66 CE. Nothing in this chapter or the passage has any relationship to "Jesus Christ", and the use of "Christ" as an identifier is quite odd, for Josephus never explains what this term means. One could argue that if the *Testimonium Flavianum* is authentic, then the *Testimonium Flavianum* is what provides the explanation for who this Jesus is, but if the *Testimonium Flavianum* as we have it is not authentic, at least including the reference to "Christ", then this would be a completely oddball and unsupported reference. Josephus also never uses the term "Christ" in any of his other works.

There is nothing else in *Antiquity of the Jews* that would indicate that this James has any relationship to Jesus Christ, or that anything in this discussion has any relationship to him. In addition, since this is something that is occurring around 60 CE, it would seem quite odd to identify James by his association to a person whom the Jews had supposedly killed as a common criminal some 30 years prior to the event, and 60 years prior to this writing.

Christians argue that this was done because "Jesus Christ" was so well known that it makes the passage make sense, but as we have seen, no one prior to Josephus had even written about Jesus Christ aside from some Christians, so it certainly does not seem that he was well known.

A much more likely case here is that the Jesus mentioned as the brother of James is the same Jesus who is the son of Damneus.

There are three possible explanations, then, for the inclusion of the phrase "*who is called Christ*".

- The passage is authentic, but Jesus son of Damneus was also called "Christ", which simply means anointed
- The passage is authentic and corresponds to Acts 12:2, talking about James son of Zebedee, in which case the inclusion of Christ comes from later legend
- The phrase "*who is called Christ*" is a later insertion into the text

The first thing to consider is that Jesus the son of Damneus was called "Christ", which is

actually possible. "Christ" is just a transliteration of the Greek word *Christos* (*Χριστος*), which is a translation of the Hebrew *Mashiah*, which simply means *anointed*, or *one who is anointed*.

Jewish kings and high priests were called *anointed ones*, and this is used many times in the Hebrew scriptures. It is only Christians who assume that the term means "the one and only anointed one", but this passage could also be translated:

...and brought before them the brother of Jesus, called The Anointed, whose name was James, and some others...

Indeed, the Jewish Encyclopedia discusses the issues surrounding Christ, Messiah, and anointing and states:

Septuagint translation of Hebrew "Mashiah" ("Messiah"=The Anointed), applied by Christians exclusively to Jesus as the Messiah.

- Christ - Jewish Encyclopedia

In post-exilic times, the high priest, filling the place formerly occupied by the king, is spoken of as "ha-Kohen ha-Mashiah" (the anointed priest; Lev. iv. 3, 5, 16; vi. 5), also (Dan. ix. 25, 26) as "Mashiah Nagid" (an anointed one, a ruler) and simply "Mashiah" (an anointed one), referring to Onias III.

- Messiah - Jewish Encyclopedia

The most important use of mashah is in connection with certain sacred persons. The principal and oldest of these is the king, who was anointed from the earliest times (Judges, ix. 8, 15; I Sam. ix. 16, x. 1; II Sam. xix. 10; I Kings, i. 39, 45; II Kings, ix. 3, 6, xi. 12). So exclusively was Anointing reserved for the king in this period that "the Lord's anointed" became a synonym for king (I Sam. xii. 3, 5, xxvi. 11; II Sam. i. 14; Ps. xx. 7). This custom was older than the Hebrews. El-Amarna Tablet No. 37 tells of the anointing of a king.

In that section of the Pentateuch known as the Priestly Code the high priest is anointed (Ex. xxix. 7; Lev. vi. 13, viii. 12), and, in passages which critics regard as additions to the Priestly Code, other priests as well (Ex. xxx. 30, xl. 13-15). It appears from the use of "anointed priest," in the sense of high priest (Lev. iv. 5-7, 16; Num. xxxv. 25, etc.), that the high priest was at first the only one anointed, and that the practice of anointing all the priests was a later development (compare Num. iii. 3; Dillman on Lev. viii. 12-14; Nowack, "Lehrbuch der Hebräischen Archäologie," ii.

...

Rabbinical tradition distinguishes also between the regular high priest and the priest anointed for the special purpose of leading in war—*mashuah milhamah* (Sotah, viii. 1; Yoma, 72b, 73a). According to tradition (see Josippon, xx.; Chronicle of Jerahmeel, xci. 3; compare I Macc. iii. 55), Judas Maccabeus was anointed as priest for the war before he proclaimed the words prescribed in Deut. xx. 1-9.

Anointing stands for greatness (Sifre, Num. 117; Yer. Bik. ii. 64d): consequently, "Touch not mine anointed" signifies "my great ones."

- Anointing - Jewish Encyclopedia

Other issues that are related to this are the fact that Josephus is writing around 95 CE, so is he saying explicitly that this Jesus was called Mashiah before this event took place, or is he using a term that this Jesus came to be known by, even though he may not have been known by that name at this point in history? This is similar to a situation where someone writes a passage about someone like Ronald Reagan today and writes, "Ronald, who was called the Gipper," even though they may be talking about a point in his life prior to him having acquired that nickname.

This passage could simply be saying that Jesus son of Damneus was considered a great person, or an already holy person, hence the reason that he, the brother of James who was put to death, is being given the high priesthood. This could also simply be using a description of Jesus son of Damneus that he was later called. This event supposedly happened around 62 CE, which is getting very close to the Jewish War with Rome, and this is a term that was even more heavily used in relation to "war priests", or high priests during a time of war, or priests who, in the Jewish tradition, actually acted as generals. Jesus son of Damneus was not a high priest during the war, but Jesus son of Sapphas was the son of a high priest and a general in the war, so it could be talking about him.

Despite the fact that Acts 12:2 says that Herod had James killed by the sword, this could simply be a confusion of the details. Both Acts and the passage by Josephus say that James was held along with companions. It is possible that both Acts 12:2 and Josephus are talking about the same incident, but that they both have some of the details confused. If the passage by Josephus does correspond to Acts 12:2, then Josephus is describing the killing of James son of Zebedee here, and the mention of Jesus really does mean the Jesus of the Gospels, but Josephus is working from public lore and simply making what would have been a common mistake. If this corresponds to Acts 12:2 then this would also corroborate the idea that James son of Zebedee was called "the Lord's brother", which may well have been the source of the initial confusion, with later generations taking the phrase literally. If this is describing the killing of James son of Zebedee then it's obvious that this isn't really the brother of Jesus, but rather it demonstrates the confusion over these names by the end of the 1st century.

All in all, however, this is probably not the case. The phrase, "*who was called Christ,*" was probably inserted into the text later.

One argument against this being authentic is that Josephus doesn't use the term *Christos* anywhere else, so it does not appear likely that this is original. If it were original, however, then there are certainly many possibilities for reading the text, and it can't simply be presumed that this is talking about the Jesus Christ of the Gospels, but more than likely it isn't original in the first place.

The other arguments against this being original deal with the structure of the sentence, the subject matter of the passage, the fact that even if Jesus Christ existed he would be an odd person for Josephus to use as an identifier for someone else, especially by brotherhood, and the fact that if this were talking about "James the Just" (which it almost certainly isn't for reasons we shall see) then this James himself would have been more famous than Jesus at this point in time and this association would have made no sense, as James himself, according to Christian legend, was a community leader and well known person, though there is no reference to him in the non-Christian literature (unless this is a reference to him). In addition, as we have seen, the idea that "James the Just" was a brother of Jesus was a later Christian tradition that developed in the 2nd century.

Let's read the passage again, without "*who was called Christ*" in the passage:

But this younger Ananus, who, as we have told you already, took the high priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews, as we have already observed; when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority]. **Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, whose name was James, and some others;** and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned: but as for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done; they also sent to the king [Agrippa], desiring him to send to Ananus that he should act so no more, for that what he had already done was not to be justified; nay, some of them went also to meet Albinus, as he was upon his journey from Alexandria, and informed him that it was not lawful for Ananus to assemble a sanhedrim without his consent. Whereupon Albinus complied with what they said, and wrote in anger to Ananus, and threatened that he would bring him to punishment for what he had done; **on which king Agrippa took the high priesthood from him, when he had ruled but three months, and made Jesus, the son of Damneus, high priest.**

What this passage would be saying is that Ananus was a priest who abused his power.

Ananus wrongly condemned James and some others to death, but the equitable citizens wrote to Herod to complain about this, so Herod punished Ananus by taking the high priesthood from him and giving it to James' brother, Jesus (son of Damneus).

This story makes perfect sense, follows the typical writing style of Josephus, and now the mention of Jesus as the brother of James has context and relevancy. The story here is about Ananus, and how Jesus son of Damneus obtained the high priesthood. The whole point of the sentence that mentions James is to explain issues relevant to Jesus son of Damneus. If this sentence were talking about Jesus Christ, then Jesus Christ would be the one who has no relation to the story, and thus we would expect James to come first in the sentence, because James would be who was being talked about, but in this case Jesus is mentioned first because Jesus is who is being talked about, and it only makes sense that Jesus is the one being talked about if this is Jesus son of Damneus, whom the narrative is about.

We can also break the text down as follows:

[Ananus unlawfully] assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus and some others; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned: but as for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done; ... Whereupon Albinus complied with what they said, and wrote in anger to Ananus, and threatened that he would bring him to punishment for what he had done; on which king Agrippa took the high priesthood from him and made Jesus, the son of Damneus, high priest.

"Jesus Christ", some guy that was presumably killed for being a false prophet 30 years prior, is an obscure reference out of the blue that has no relation to the narrative.

The story here makes sense if the James is the brother of Jesus son of Damneus, because giving the high priesthood to Jesus would then be seen as a form of reparation to the family for the wrongful death of James, and as a further punishment to Ananus.

Why wouldn't Josephus put the "son of" identifier in the first reference instead of after the fact? Well, for the very reason that *"brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James"* seems odd, because it's a double qualifier and a cumbersome sentence. In addition, the strong point of the passage is the naming of Jesus as the high priest, thus Josephus uses the formality of identifying Jesus by his father when he states that he was named the high priest.

Why didn't he identify James by his father instead? Because if James is related to Jesus son of Damneus then this is implied, and Jesus is the more important figure, he is the one who becomes high priest. It is also possible, by the way, that *"whose name was James"* is a part of the inserted text as well, and what was really added was *"who was called Christ,*

whose name was James", however I find this more doubtful.

So, if "who was called Christ" is not authentic, then how did it get there? There are two likely possibilities, either it came from the insertion of a note, or it was later inserted into the text as a correction based on references made by Origen, which appear to cite Josephus as a source for a link between Jesus and James. Origen's citations, however, are highly problematic and almost certainly spurious.

As with the *Testimonium Flavianum*, if this was inserted based on a marginal or interlinear note then it was probably a completely innocent mistake. These types of things happened. A Christian reading the work may have seen the names Jesus and James together and jumped to the conclusion that this was "Jesus Christ", and then made a note saying so. A later scribe would have then just incorporated it, assuming it to be true, in order to clarify the passage.

The other, and I believe more likely, possibility is that Origen's passage that attributed to Josephus a claim that Jesus was called Christ is actually a mistake on Origen's part, but this set a precedent leading others believe that Josephus had actually said this.

Let's look again at Origen's citation of this passage from *Against Celsus*:

I would like to say to Celsus, who represents the Jew as accepting somehow John as a Baptist, who baptized Jesus, that the existence of John the Baptist, baptizing for the remission of sins, is related by one who lived no great length of time after John and Jesus. For in the 18th book of his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus bears witness to John as having been a Baptist, and as promising purification to those who underwent the rite. Now this writer, although not believing in Jesus as the Christ, in **seeking after the cause of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple**, whereas he ought to have said that the conspiracy against Jesus was the cause of these calamities befalling the people, since they put to death Christ, who was a prophet, says nevertheless-being, although against his will, not far from the truth-that **these disasters happened to the Jews as a punishment for the death of James the Just, who was a brother of Jesus (called Christ),-the Jews having put him to death, although he was a man most distinguished for his justice.** Paul, a genuine disciple of Jesus, says that he regarded this James as a brother of the Lord, not so much on account of their relationship by blood, or of their being brought up together, as because of his virtue and doctrine
- *Against Celsus*; Origen

Origen actually cites Josephus as a source for "brother of Jesus" three times, and in every case, as in this one, he paraphrases and mentions things that no one has ever been able to

find in any works of Josephus. In fact in *The Jewish War*, written about two decades before *Antiquity*, Josephus attributed the destruction that befell the Jews to the deaths of both Ananus the elder (the father of the corrupt Ananus) and either Jesus son of Damneus or Jesus son of Gamaliel (he does not specify), whom he said were shrewd negotiators and level-headed decision makers who opposed the war against the Romans.

What appears to be the case is that Origen has somehow confused the works of Josephus with the works of the early Christian chronicler Hegesippus. Hegesippus is known as the earliest chronicler of Christian history, and he was also an apologist. His works are universally acknowledged as highly flawed and imaginative, basically inventing "history", but he did also use historical sources. He may also be, as I have already discussed, the first person to have clearly called "James the Just" a literal "brother of the Lord" in a written work. Origen's paraphrase above does correspond to passages in the works of Hegesippus, and thus his citations of "Josephus" were probably really citations of Hegesippus, or citations of commentaries that themselves mixed the sources of Josephus and Hegesippus, or perhaps Hegesippus himself is the source of the error; perhaps he claimed that Josephus made this correlation.

Here is a passage from Hegesippus, which corresponds to Origen's passage in *Against Celsus*:

James, the Lord's brother, succeeds to the government of the Church, in conjunction with the apostles. He has been universally called the Just, from the days of the Lord down to the present time. For many bore the name of James; but this one was holy from his mother's womb. He drank no wine or other intoxicating liquor, nor did he eat flesh; no razor came upon his head; he did not anoint himself with oil, nor make use of the bath. He alone was permitted to enter the holy place: for he did not wear any woollen garment, but fine linen only. ... Therefore, in consequence of his pre-eminent justice, he was called the Just, and Oblias, which signifies in Greek Defense of the People, and Justice, in accordance with what the prophets declare concerning him.

...

The aforesaid scribes and Pharisees accordingly set James on the summit of the temple, and cried aloud to him, and said: "O just one, whom we are all bound to obey, forasmuch as the people is in error, and follows Jesus the crucified, do thou tell us what is the door of Jesus, the crucified." And he answered with a loud voice: "Why ask ye me concerning Jesus the Son of man? He Himself sitteth in heaven, at the right hand of the Great Power, and shall come on the clouds of heaven."

And, when many were fully convinced by these words, and offered praise for the testimony of James, and said,

"Hosanna to the son of David," then again the said Pharisees and scribes said to one another, "We have not done well in procuring this testimony to Jesus. But let us go up and throw him down, that they may be afraid, and not believe him." And they cried aloud, and said: "Oh! oh! the just man himself is in error." Thus they fulfilled the Scripture written in Isaiah: "Let us away with the just man, because he is troublesome to us: therefore shall they eat the fruit of their doings." So they went up and threw down the just man, and said to one another: "Let us stone James the Just." And they began to stone him: for he was not killed by the fall; but he turned, and kneeled down, and said: "I beseech Thee, Lord God our Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

And, while they were thus stoning him to death, one of the priests, the sons of Rechab, the son of Rechabim, to whom testimony is borne by Jeremiah the prophet, began to cry aloud, saying: "Cease, what do ye? The just man is praying for us." But one among them, one of the fullers, took the staff with which he was accustomed to wring out the garments he dyed, and hurled it at the head of the just man.

And so he suffered martyrdom; and they buried him on the spot, and the pillar erected to his memory still remains, close by the temple. This man was a true witness to both Jews and Greeks that Jesus is the Christ.

And shortly after Vespasian besieged Judaea, taking them captive.

- *Commentaries on the Acts of the Church*; Hegesippus, 165-175

This is the only known account that precedes the writing of Origen which resembles what he cites in *Against Celsus*, and it resembles his account very well. The mixing up of authors was not uncommon, and these types of confusions are not otherwise unknown. This is especially likely in the case of Josephus and Hegesippus because we know that there was on-going confusion about these two names, and some scholars think that Hegesippus is actually a corruption of the name Josephus, meaning that these two different writers may both have had the same name. In Greek Josephus is written *Iosippus*, and some people have translated this as Hegesippus while others translated it as Josephus. It is considered proper to translate it as Josephus, but this was a common error that is more well known in relation to later 4th century works that are wrongly attributed to a Hegesippus based on the name *Iosippus* within the text.

How exactly Origen got confused we cannot know. Maybe he was confused by the names. Maybe he got a scroll of Hegesippus that was wrongly attributed to Josephus by someone else. We also know of another work that was wrongly attributed to Josephus, which was

probably written by the 3rd century Christian writer Hippolytus, *Discourse to the Greeks Concerning Hades*. Indeed this work is still commonly attributed to Josephus, though scholars do not acknowledge it as such.

These types of mistakes happened, but that only explains Origen's citation, what about the text from Josephus that we have today?

Well, either the phrase "*who was called Christ*" was an independent insertion into the text of a marginal or interlinear note, or Origen actually set the precedent and later scribes, when looking for clarity, knew of Origen's work and inserted the phrase into Josephus thinking that it was supposed to go there.

This again is not uncommon. Firstly, many scribes were familiar with many works, and it would not be uncommon for later scribes who were copying Josephus to have also read or copied Origen. Secondly, scribes were supposed to make an effort to clarify ambiguous names, or to make corrections based on other references. If they read a work that didn't have a passage that someone else had claimed that it did have, they were then supposed to try and figure out what was original and then make the correction, so if someone had read one of Origen's three works where he claimed that Josephus said that James was the brother of Jesus Christ, then when making their copies of this passage in Josephus it would have looked to them like a mistake if the phrase about Christ was not there, thus they would have added it.

So, what we can say with confidence about the "*brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James*" passage, is that the inclusion of "*who was called Christ*" seems very much out of place and the entire passage makes more sense when "*who was called Christ*" is removed. This phrase is in the middle of a passage that is discussing Jesus son of Damneus, and the passage is clear and meaningful without this phrase present. Indeed, introducing a separate Jesus that is unrelated to the story seems quite unlikely.

We also know that Origen is cited as the earliest confirmation of this passage, but Origen's reference to Josephus is highly problematic and doesn't comply with anything that we know of that has ever been written by Josephus, and it is pretty unbelievable that Josephus would have made any commentary on "James the Just", since this is just a Christian title and we have no such existing commentary on "James the Just" from Josephus. It appears that Origen somehow got his sources confused and mixed up the works of Hegesippus with Josephus, leading him to falsely attribute to Josephus a phrase that he never wrote.

This mistaken attribution by Origen then led other scribes to insert the text into Josephus at the only place where a James was mentioned as the brother of a Jesus, in a passage that is really clearly talking about a different Jesus.

With all of this we can see that there are certainly no solid independent attestations to the existence of Jesus Christ in the non-Christian literature. Modern scholarship recognizes that the *Testimonium Flavianum* is the only reasonably possible independent witness to Jesus Christ in the non-Christian literature, and there is nothing else aside from that one passage that could even claim to confirm his existence.

The reality, however, is that even the *Testimonium Flavianum* cannot be maintained as an affirmation of the existence of Jesus Christ. The *Testimonium Flavianum* is by far best explained as the full insertion of a later note, and this was the dominant view among Protestant scholars before the rise of the challenge to the existence of Jesus. The *Testimonium Flavianum* has only been strongly defended as at least partly authentic within the past 100 years, which corresponds to when the challenge to the existence of Jesus emerged and became substantial. In short, the *Testimonium Flavianum* is strongly defended now because Christian scholars know that it is the last thread tying Jesus into history.

Additionally, the arguments related to the *Testimonium Flavianum* have evolved substantially since it was first challenged. The first challenge to the *Testimonium Flavianum* was presented by Protestant scholars who believed that it was intentionally inserted by the Catholic historian Eusebius in an attempt to misrepresent history, making the *Testimonium Flavianum* a product of some conspiracy. This is not likely, and not supported by the nature of the passage, but the innocent insertion of a note, believing that it was a part of the text, is both likely and fits the nature of the passage.

Empty Tomb? What Tomb?

There is no evidence of any knowledge of a tomb of Jesus (empty or occupied) prior to the Gospel stories

It is interesting that so much effort goes into defending the claim of the "empty tomb" of Jesus that appears in the ending scenes of the Gospels, yet there is nothing in any of the writings that precede the Gospels that makes any mention of either an "empty tomb", burial site of any kind, or even a crucifixion site. Would Paul have said nothing about the site of Jesus' burial? Would Paul not have mentioned a visit to Golgotha, the location of Jesus' crucifixion?

It's not just Paul, but indeed there is no evidence of any veneration of any locations that are associated with Jesus in the Gospels until after the Gospels were circulated. Most importantly, though, we find no evidence of any veneration of the supposed tomb of Christ, which to this day remains an unknown and unidentifiable locale (recent claims of having found the Jesus family tomb notwithstanding).

In *Beyond Resurrection*, New Testament scholar Alexander J. M. Wedderburn attempts to find evidence for the resurrection of Jesus and the "empty tomb". He concludes that no such evidence exists and that Christians have to remain agnostic as to the historical reality of this event and continue to take it on faith. As a part of his investigation into the matter, Wedderburn addresses the fact that we have no evidence of a veneration of the tomb of Jesus following his supposed death. He considers the possibility that early believers would simply not have cared about this site, but noting that the site of the "empty tomb" would have been seen as the site of the resurrection itself he asks, *"Was that not in itself reason enough to note and remember and cherish the site, regardless of whether it contained Jesus' remains or not?"*

This is certainly a significant issue. If Jesus were a real but mortal person, and the Gospels are based on his real life, then we should expect that there would have been some knowledge of his real death and his real burial, yet we find no evidence of this. The earliest alternative stories that we find about what happened to Jesus after the crucifixion didn't come along until centuries after the Gospels were written. In effect, these are nothing more than late developing legends that themselves have no connection to history, they are just alternative explanations that seek to explain away the so-called resurrection.

If, on the other hand, Jesus really was divine and really was resurrected, and the Gospels accurately portray the events of his death and resurrection, then we should still expect to find some continuous line of veneration of the site of his burial and resurrection, but again we do not.

Certainly people would have been interested in visiting this empty tomb. Certainly at least Paul would have mentioned it. After all, later Christians were highly interested in trying to locate this supposed tomb, just as they have been interested in locating his supposed place of birth, the hill upon which he was crucified, and many other things, but we cannot

honestly point to any of these locations.

Indeed it is ironic that Christian apologists have tried to use the fact that there is no evidence for veneration of a tomb of Jesus to "prove" the "truth" of the resurrection. They argue that the lack of veneration proves that there was no body to venerate, thus, he had to have been resurrected, but all this pre-supposes that there was an actual Jesus to begin with, and that he was really crucified and buried in the manner according to the Gospels. For these apologists Jesus definitely existed and was killed, so therefore the only explanation for the lack of veneration of his burial site is that he was resurrected and thus was no longer there.

But as Wedderburn noted, even an empty tomb would have been venerated if what the Gospels say is in any way historical.

By far, the better explanation for why there was no veneration is that there was no Jesus to venerate.

Indeed, this issue seems to have been recognized by the author of Luke and Acts, for it is in both Luke and Acts that we have the story of Jesus' bodily ascension into heaven. The claim that someone had bodily ascended into heaven was actually not uncommon in the Greek and Roman world when applied to mythical heroes whom the people wanted to bury and venerate. The claims were then made that the hero had bodily ascended into heaven, leaving no remains, and thus no need to search for his body.

Acts 1:

6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

This story provides a convenient explanation for why nothing of Jesus remained. People were perhaps asking, even if Jesus had been brought back to life, then what? Where is his body now? The answer of course came in saying that his entire body had gone to heaven, thus there were no traces of him left, and that's why there is nothing of him to find.

Are we really to believe that a historical person who really existed had to have bodily

disappearance stories written about him to explain his lack of presence even in death? For those who subscribe to a secular historical view of Jesus, as a real man that is exaggeratedly described in the Gospels, why would stories of bodily disappearance be crafted around a real man? Not only do we have to ask this question about Jesus, however, but the question is also raised about Mary, his supposed mother.

Mary, the supposed mother of Jesus, is never mentioned by Paul, nor in any canonical work outside of the Gospels and *Acts of the Apostles*. If Jesus had an earthly mother who was still alive, then why didn't Paul visit her? Why wasn't the early Christian community caring for Mary? Paul never says anything about taking care of the mother of the Lord or anything like this. What happened to Mary when she died? Why wasn't her grave venerated? For that matter where is her grave? Well, according to later legend, Mary's body ascended into heaven as well. Apparently the Church fathers realized the predicament of this situation and crafted stories about her removal from the face of the earth too.

And when the Lord's day came, at the third hour, just as the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles in a cloud, so Christ descended with a multitude of angels, and received the soul of His beloved mother. For there was such splendor and perfume of sweetness, and angels singing the songs of songs, where the Lord says, As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters, that all who were there present fell on their faces, as the apostles fell when Christ transfigured Himself before them on Mount Thabor, and for a whole hour and a half no one was able to rise. But when the light went away, and at the same time with the light itself, the soul of the blessed virgin Mary was taken up into heaven with psalms, and hymns, and songs of songs. And as the cloud went up the whole earth shook, and in one moment all the inhabitants of Jerusalem openly saw the departure of St. Mary.

And that same hour Satan entered into them, and they began to consider what they were to do with her body. And they took up weapons, that they might burn her body and kill the apostles, because from her had gone forth the dispersions of Israel, on account of their sins and the gathering together of the Gentiles. But they were struck with blindness, striking their heads against the walls, and striking each other. Then the apostles, alarmed by so much brightness, arose, and with psalms carried the holy body down from Mount Zion to the valley of Jehoshaphat. But as they were going in the middle of the road, behold, a certain Jew, Reuben by name, wishing to throw to the ground the holy bier with the body of the blessed Mary. But his hands dried up, even to the elbow; whether he would or not, he went down even to the Valley of Jehoshaphat, weeping and lamenting because his hands were raised to the bier, and he was not able to draw back his hands to himself. And he began to ask the apostles that by

their prayer he might be saved and made a Christian. Then the apostles, bending their knees, asked the Lord to let him loose. And he, being healed that same hour, giving thanks to God and kissing the feet of the queen of all the saints and apostles, was baptized in that same place, and began to preach the name of our God Jesus Christ.

Then the apostles with great honor laid the body in the tomb, weeping and singing through exceeding love and sweetness. **And suddenly there shone round them a light from heaven, and they fell to the ground, and the holy body was taken up by angels into heaven.**

Then the most blessed Thomas was suddenly brought to the Mount of Olivet, and saw the most blessed body going up to heaven, and began to cry out and say: O holy mother, blessed mother, spotless mother, if I have now found grace because I see you, make your servant joyful through your compassion, because you are going to heaven.

- *The Assumption of Mary*; (falsely attributed to John) 5th century

This story, or at least the belief in the assumption of Mary, is an article of faith for Catholics, something that they are "required" to accept as true.

The fact of the matter is, however, that there is no evidence for Mary and there was no discussion of Mary until the Gospel stories came along. If there were a real Jesus, however, and there were a real Mary, then it seems reasonable that the followers of Jesus would have been concerned to care for Mary after his death and that she would have had some type of burial and that her grave would have been venerated, but none of this is the case. There are two claimed graves of Mary today, one in Jerusalem and one in Ephesus, neither of which are authentic. The grave in Jerusalem is known to have been created in the 6th or 7th century, and Ephesus is the island that was home to the goddess Diana, where her shrines covered the land and she was worshiped as a moon goddess. (Incidentally, images of Mary today resemble the images of Diana.) Mary appears for the first time in the Gospels and disappears just as quickly, only becoming venerated centuries later in the pattern of pagan goddess tradition.

There is no evidence for a legitimate grave, or even knowledge of a grave, for either Jesus or Mary, and there is no sign of any discussion of a tomb of Jesus, empty or occupied, until the advent of the Gospel stories.

Phantom or Flesh?

There were many conflicting beliefs about who Jesus Christ was in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd centuries, including beliefs that he had never existed on earth "in the flesh"

Prior to the adoption of Catholicism by the Roman Empire in the 4th century, there were many different beliefs about Jesus Christ. The Catholics held a specific view of Jesus Christ as a real live, historical, person, who was both God, the only son of God, and a fully human being. During the first 300 years of Christian belief, however, this was not the case. There were many different groups of Christians early on, some of them include:

- Marcionism – Christ was a purely spiritual entity
- Nestorianism – Jesus and Christ were two different entities
- Docetism – Jesus appeared physical, but he was really incorporeal
- Apollinarism – Jesus had a human body and human soul, but a divine mind
- Arianism- Jesus was the son of God, not God himself
- Catholicism – Jesus was both God and the son of God

Some of these different groups, which are often lumped together under the name Gnostics, also used some of the Gospels and some of them even had different versions of some of the Gospels and different versions of the letters of Paul, in addition to other writings that they considered holy.

The Catholics, in fact, were late-developing group, that came along after some of these other groups. We don't have much information from these different groups in their own words, instead what we have mostly are comments on these groups made by Catholics and other opponents of their views. The question is, if Jesus Christ had just been a man on earth and led a life like the one portrayed in the Gospels, then how could there be such a wide variety of beliefs about who and what Jesus Christ was?

One of the most often noted and striking evidences of the doubts about the historical existence of Jesus early on comes from the book of 2 John in the Bible, which was written in the late 1st century or early 2nd century. 2 John states:

2 John 1:

7 **Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world.** Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. 8 Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. 9 Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. 11 Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.

The letter of 2 John is here talking about the fact that many people at the time who did

preach about Jesus Christ did not regard him as having existed in flesh and blood. We find something similar in 1 John as well:

1 John 4:

1 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 **This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,** 3 **but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.** This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

Many of the early Christian apologists that are now considered the "correct ones" defended the belief in Jesus as both human and divine from the many beliefs that Jesus Christ was something other than this.

Thus it is true to call Him man and to call Him not man; man, because He was capable of death; not man, on account of His being diviner than man. Marcion, I suppose, took sound words in a wrong sense, when he rejected His birth from Mary, and declared that as to His divine nature He was not born of Mary, and hence made bold to delete from the Gospel the passages which have this effect. **And a like fate seems to have overtaken those who make away with His humanity and receive His deity alone;** and also those opposites of these who cancel His deity and confess Him as a man to be a holy man, and the most righteous of all men.

- *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Book X); Origen, 3rd century

In his commentary on the Gospel of John not only does Origen state that the Gospels have to be read "spiritually" and not literally, but he also notes here that Marcion did not consider Jesus to have been literally born and that others did not believe in his humanity at all, instead only viewing Jesus Christ as a god.

Now a person might say that these men, and those who hold a different opinion, are yet near neighbors, being involved in like error. For those men, indeed, either profess that Christ came into our life a mere man, and deny the talent of His divinity, or else, **acknowledging Him to be God, they deny, on the other hand, His humanity, and teach that His appearances to those who saw Him as man were illusory, inasmuch as He did not bear with Him true manhood, but was rather a kind of phantom manifestation.** Of this class are, for example, Marcion and Valentinus, and the Gnostics, who sunder the Word from the flesh, and thus set aside the one talent, viz., the incarnation.

- *Domatical Treatise*; Hippolytus, 3rd century

Here again we see a range of views about Christ, ranging from the belief that he was just a man to the belief that he was just a god.

There are, to be sure, other things also quite as foolish (as the birth of Christ), which have reference to the humiliations and sufferings of God. Or else, let them call a crucified God "wisdom." But Marcion will apply the knife to this doctrine also, and even with greater reason. For which is more unworthy of God, which is more likely to raise a blush of shame, that God should be born, or that He should die? that He should bear the flesh, or the cross? be circumcised, or be crucified? be cradled, or be coffined? be laid in a manger, or in a tomb? Talk of "wisdom!" You will show more of that if you refuse to believe this also. But, after all, you will not be "wise" unless you become a "fool" to the world, by believing "the foolish things of God." **Have you, then, cut away all sufferings from Christ, on the ground that, as a mere phantom, He was incapable of experiencing them? We have said above that He might possibly have undergone the unreal mockeries of an imaginary birth and infancy. But answer me at once, you that murder truth: Was not God really crucified? And, having been really crucified, did He not really die? And, having indeed really died, did He not really rise again?** Falsely did Paul "determine to know nothing amongst us but Jesus and Him crucified;" falsely has he impressed upon us that He was buried; falsely inculcated that He rose again. False, therefore, is our faith also. **And all that we hope for from Christ will be a phantom.**

- *On the Flesh of Christ*; Tertullian, 3rd century

In *On the Flesh of Christ* Tertullian admits that the birth story of Jesus may not be true, but he maintains that he was still both a man and a god. We will come back to this work in the next section when discussing the arguments that were given in favor of Jesus having existed in this world "in the flesh".

Our heretic must now cease to borrow poison from the Jew—"the asp," as the adage runs, "from the viper"—and henceforth vomit forth the virulence of his own disposition, **as when he alleges Christ to be a phantom.** Except, indeed, that this opinion of his will be sure to have others to maintain it in his precocious and somewhat abortive Marcionites, whom the Apostle John designated as antichrists, when **they denied that Christ was come in the flesh;** not that they did this with the view of establishing the right of the other god (for on this point also they had been branded by the same apostle), but

because they had started with assuming the incredibility of an incarnate God.

- *Against Marcion* (Book III); Tertullian, 3rd century

Against Marcion is a long polemic against the Gnostic leader Marcion, who, like many others, did not believe that Jesus Christ was a flesh and blood human being, but nevertheless did believe in Jesus Christ. It is important to note here that Marcion and all of the other so-called heretics are people who called themselves Christians and believed in Jesus Christ, but whose beliefs differed from those that we now call Catholic, which literally means "universal".

Afterwards, again, followed Saturninus: he, too, affirming that the innascible Virtue, that is God, abides in the highest regions, and that those regions are infinite, and in the regions immediately above us; but that angels far removed from Him made the lower world; and that, because light from above had flashed refulgently in the lower regions, the angels had carefully tried to form man after the similitude of that light; that man lay crawling on the surface of the earth; that this light and this higher virtue was, thanks to mercy, the salvable spark in man, while all the rest of him perishes; **that Christ had not existed in a bodily substance, and had endured a quasi-passion in a phantasmal shape merely; that a resurrection of the flesh there will by no means be.**

- *Against All Heresies*; Tertullian, 3rd century

To this is added one Cerdo. He introduces two first causes, that is, two Gods—one good, the other cruel: the good being the superior; the latter, the cruel one, being the creator of the world. He repudiates the prophecies and the Law; renounces God the Creator; **maintains that Christ who came was the Son of the superior God; affirms that He was not in the substance of flesh; states Him to have been only in a phantasmal shape, to have not really suffered, but undergone a quasipassion, and not to have been born of a virgin, nay, really not to have been born at all.** A resurrection of the soul merely does he approve, denying that of the body.

- *Against All Heresies*; Tertullian, 3rd century

Close on their heels follows Apelles, a disciple of Marcion, ... The Law and the prophets he repudiates. **Christ he neither, like Marcion, affirms to have been in a phantasmal shape, nor yet in substance of a true body, as the Gospel teaches; but says, because He descended from the upper regions, that in the course of His descent He wove together for Himself a starry and airy flesh; and, in His resurrection, restored, in the course of His ascent,**

to the several individual elements whatever had been borrowed in His descent: and thus—the several parts of His body dispersed—He reinstated in heaven His spirit only.

This man denies the resurrection of the flesh.

- *Against All Heresies*; Tertullian, 3rd century

Saturninus was another of those who believed in Jesus Christ, but did not believe that he was a human being. Cerdo and Apelles did not believe Jesus to have been born at all! How is it that so many people believed in a phantom Jesus if he was a man and his story was inspired by his life?

But, according to these men, neither was the Word made flesh, nor Christ, nor the Savior, who was produced from [the joint contributions of] all [the Æons]. For they will have it, that the Word and Christ never came into this world; that the Savior, too, never became incarnate, nor suffered, but that He descended like a dove upon the dispensational Jesus; and that, as soon as He had declared the unknown Father, He did again ascend into the Pleroma. Some, however, make the assertion, that this dispensational Jesus did become incarnate, and suffered, whom they represent as having passed through Mary just as water through a tube; but others allege him to be the Son of the Demiurge, upon whom the dispensational Jesus descended; while others, again, say that Jesus was born from Joseph and Mary, and that the Christ from above descended upon him, being without flesh, and impassible. But according to the opinion of no one of the heretics was the Word of God made flesh. For if anyone carefully examines the systems of them all, he will find that the Word of God is brought in by all of them as not having become incarnate (*sine carne*) and impassible, as is also the Christ from above. Others consider Him to have been manifested as a transfigured man; but they maintain Him to have been neither born nor to have become incarnate; while others [hold] that He did not assume a human form at all, but that, as a dove, He did descend upon that Jesus who was born from Mary. Therefore the Lord's disciple, pointing them all out as false witnesses, says, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."

- *Adversus Haereses* (Book III); Irenaeus, 175

From Irenaeus, writing in the 2nd century, we see that by this early time there was already a huge variety of beliefs about who or what Jesus Christ was. Irenaeus was writing about 100 to 60 years after the Gospels had been in circulation, and we can see that beliefs about Jesus were clearly impacted by the Gospels, but that there were a variety of beliefs as well. The talk about Christ descending in the form of a dove on a "dispensational Jesus" is actually reflected in the Gospel of Mark. The variety of beliefs ranged from Christ never

having become incarnate at all, to Christ having entered into the body of a human Jesus, to the Catholic belief that Jesus *was* Christ, and that he was both human and divine.

Obviously there was much disagreement about the nature of Jesus Christ in the early years, but interestingly enough we know of at least one early Christian bishop who seems to have never even heard of Jesus Christ, Theophilus of Antioch who lived from approximately 115 to 185. We have three books (letters) written by Theophilus while he was in Antioch, and his works clearly show that his theology was very much Christian in nature, yet he never mentioned Jesus Christ, and he explained Christianity in a way that has nothing to do with any specific leader. Theophilus stated that God is invisible and known by his works, such as the ordering of the seasons and things of this nature. Theophilus defended the Christian doctrine of resurrection and life after death by again referring to the seasons and the growth of seeds and things like this. How could an early Christian defend the doctrine of resurrection without mentioning Jesus Christ, unless he had indeed never heard of him or the story of his death and resurrection? Theophilus went on to state that the reason that Christians were called Christians was because they anointed themselves with oil, saying nothing about any supposed "Christ" figure.

CHAP. XII.--MEANING OF THE NAME CHRISTIAN.

And about your laughing at me and calling me "Christian," you know not what you are saying. First, because that which is anointed is sweet and serviceable, and far from contemptible. For what ship can be serviceable and seaworthy, unless it be first caulked [anointed]? Or what castle or house is beautiful and serviceable when it has not been anointed? And what man, when he enters into this life or into the gymnasium, is not anointed with oil? And what work has either ornament or beauty unless it be anointed and burnished? Then the air and all that is under heaven is in a certain sort anointed by light and spirit; and are you unwilling to be anointed with the oil of God? Wherefore we are called Christians on this account, because we are anointed with the oil of God.

- *Theophilus To Autolycus* (Book I), 180-185

Here we see the term Christian used as mentioned before, to mean anointed. Theophilus went on to describe the creation of the world by God via "The Word", and to defend the creation account of Genesis.

CHAP. X.--THE WORLD CREATED BY GOD THROUGH THE WORD.

God made all things out of nothing; for nothing was coeval with God: but He being His own place, and wanting nothing, and existing before the ages, willed to make man by whom He might be known; for him, therefore, He prepared the world. For he that is created is also needy; but he that is uncreated stands in need of nothing. God, then, having

His own Word internal within His own bowels, begat Him, emitting Him along with His own wisdom before all things. He had this Word as a helper in the things that were created by Him, and by Him He made all things. He is called "governing principle" [arkh], because He rules, and is Lord of all things fashioned by Him. He, then, being Spirit of God, and governing principle, and wisdom, and power of the highest, came down upon the prophets, and through them spoke of the creation of the world and of all other things. For the prophets were not when the world came into existence, but the wisdom of God which was in Him, and His holy Word which was always present with Him. Wherefore He speaks thus by the prophet Solomon: "When He prepared the heavens I was there, and when He appointed the foundations of the earth I was by Him as one brought up with Him." And Moses, who lived many years before Solomon, or, rather, the Word of God by him as by an instrument, says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." First he named the "beginning," and "creation," then he thus introduced God; for not lightly and on slight occasion is it right to name God. For the divine wisdom foreknew that some would trifle and name a multitude of gods that do not exist. In order, therefore, that the living God might be known by His works, and that [it might be known that] by His Word God created the heavens and the earth, and all that is therein, he said, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Then having spoken of their creation, he explains to us: "And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the water." This, sacred Scripture teaches at the outset, to show that matter, from which God made and fashioned the world, was in some manner created, being produced by God.

- *Theophilus To Autolytus* (Book II), 180-185

Here Theophilus has laid out a doctrine that is exactly like the Christian doctrine in the Gospel of John in every way, but he does not associate "The Word" with anyone named Jesus, he just talks about "him" as a "helper of God". He says that knowledge of the Word was granted to the prophets, such as Solomon, via the Spirit of God.

CHAP. XIV.--OF LOVING OUR ENEMIES.

And that we should be kindly disposed, not only towards those of our own stock, as some suppose, Isaiah the prophet said: "Say to those that hate you, and that cast you out, Ye are our brethren, that the name of the LORD may be glorified, and be apparent in their joy." And the

Gospel says: "Love your enemies, and pray for them that despitefully use you. For if ye love them who love you, what reward have ye? This do also the robbers and the publicans." And those that do good it teaches not to boast, lest they become men-pleasers. For it says: "Let not your left hand know what your right hand doeth." Moreover, concerning subjection to authorities and powers, and prayer for them, the divine word gives us instructions, in order that "we may lead a quiet and peaceable life." And it teaches us to render all things to all, "honor to whom honor, fear to whom fear, tribute to whom tribute; to owe no man anything, but to love all."
- *Theophilus To Autolycus* (Book III), 180-185

Here we have teachings that we associate with Jesus, but not attributed to him in any way. Instead Theophilus mentions a Gospel, but what Gospel is that, perhaps a sayings Gospel or a book of proverbs? In another section Theophilus mentions the Gospel of John, but there has been debate about the Gospel of John from the very beginning. There seems to have been an early "Gnostic" version of John, which was later altered by a different author to convert it into its current form, more compliant with the synoptics. The section that Theophilus quotes makes no mentions of Jesus and only talks about "The Word".

And hence the holy writings teach us, and all the spirit-bearing [inspired] men, one of whom, John, says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God," showing that at first God was alone, and the Word in Him. Then he says, "The Word was God; all things came into existence through Him; and apart from Him not one thing came into existence." The Word, then, being God, and being naturally produced from God, whenever the Father of the universe wills, He sends Him to any place; and He, coming, is both heard and seen, being sent by Him, and is found in a place.

- *Theophilus To Autolycus* (Book II), 180-185

Notice that Theophilus never quotes the passage about the Word becoming flesh, and he says that God sends the Word to any place at any time, but he never says anything about the incarnation of Jesus.

How is it that Theophilus is basically aware of all the doctrines of Christianity, but not aware of Jesus Christ himself? Perhaps it is because these teachings preceded the idea of an incarnate "Jesus Christ", and only later became associated with him via Paul and the Gospels and Theophilus is member of this still existing line of Christianity. Perhaps, however, Theophilus is aware of Jesus and just chose not to mention him? Whatever the case may be, Theophilus is one of a small number of Christian writers from the 2nd century, and in his works we can clearly see the existence of what appears to be some form of Christianity without any Jesus at all.

There was another early 2nd century Christian apologist who also quoted passages from the Gospel of John, but without any mention of Jesus, and that was Tatian who lived from about 110 to 180 CE.

In his Address to the Greeks Tatian never once mentioned Jesus, though he adamantly defended "Christianity". Tatian stated:

Chapter 4. The Christians Worship God Alone:

...

Man is to be honoured as a fellow-man; God alone is to be feared,—He who is not visible to human eyes, nor comes within the compass of human art. Only when I am commanded to deny Him, will I not obey, but will rather die than show myself false and ungrateful. **Our God did not begin to be in time: He alone is without beginning, and He Himself is the beginning of all things. God is a Spirit, not pervading matter, but the Maker of material spirits, and of the forms that are in matter; He is invisible, impalpable, being Himself the Father of both sensible and invisible things.** Him we know from His creation, and apprehend His invisible power by His works.

Chapter 5. The Doctrine of the Christians as to the Creation of the World:

God was in the beginning; but the beginning, we have been taught, is the power of the Logos. For the Lord of the universe, who is Himself the necessary ground of all being, inasmuch as no creature was yet in existence, was alone; but inasmuch as He was all power, Himself the necessary ground of things visible and invisible, with Him were all things; with Him, by Logos-power, the Logos Himself also, who was in Him, subsists. **And by His simple will the Logos springs forth; and the Logos, not coming forth in vain, becomes the first-begotten work of the Father. Him (the Logos) we know to be the beginning of the world.** But He came into being by participation, not by abscission; for what is cut off is separated from the original substance, but that which comes by participation, making its choice of function, does not render him deficient from whom it is taken.

Chapter 13. Theory of the Soul's Immortality:

The soul is not in itself immortal, O Greeks, but mortal. Yet it is possible for it not to die. If, indeed, it knows not the truth, it dies, and is dissolved with the body, but rises again at last at the end of the world with the body, receiving death by punishment in immortality. **But, again, if it acquires the knowledge of God, it dies not, although for a time it be dissolved. In itself it is**

darkness, and there is nothing luminous in it. And this is the meaning of the saying, "The darkness comprehends not the light." For the soul does not preserve the spirit, but is preserved by it, and the light comprehends the darkness. The Logos, in truth, is the light of God, but the ignorant soul is darkness.

Chapter 19. Depravity Lies at the Bottom of Demon-Worship:

If you are superior to the passions, you will despise all worldly things. Do not abhor us who have made this attainment, but, repudiating the demons, follow the one God. **"All things were made by Him, and without Him not one thing was made."** If there is poison in natural productions, this has supervened through our sinfulness. I am able to show the perfect truth of these things; only do you hearken, and he who believes will understand.

- *Address to the Greeks*; Tatian, 2nd century

We see here both quotations that we also find in the Gospel of John today as well as other similar concepts, but nowhere in the writing is there a single mention of Jesus. Not only that, but we find ideas that directly contradict traditional Christian beliefs, such as claiming that God is a Spirit, not material, and within this work also there is a defense of the belief in resurrection, but not associated in any way with the death and resurrection of Jesus or anyone else.

We know that parts of the Gospel of John were added by later authors, but given that at least two early Christians present quotes that we find in John without mentioning Jesus, and indeed expressing ideas that contradict a knowledge of Jesus, it seems likely that there was some document, either a version of the Gospel of John or a source that the author of that Gospel used, that contained these passages without containing any references to a figure named Jesus, nor any of the traditional Jesus narrative.

Overall we can see that it was by no means certain that Jesus Christ was a real person who had recently been on earth, even within the first 300 years of his supposed existence according to the Gospels.

The Case for Flesh

The Catholics made purely theological arguments as to why Jesus Christ had to have existed "in the flesh"

Though there was dispute about the nature of Jesus during the first few centuries of Christianity, the Catholics and those of similar views did defend the belief that Jesus Christ had existed on earth "in the flesh", so surely they produced some meaningful evidence to support their beliefs right? Wrong. The defenses of the belief that Jesus had existed "in the flesh" were all made on theological grounds and through the use of scriptures.

The humanity of Jesus Christ was basically defended on two grounds:

- Suffering and a flesh and blood sacrifice were required to create a new covenant
- The resurrection of a flesh and blood Jesus proved that resurrection of the flesh was possible

These are the two main reasons why apologists argued that Jesus had to have existed "in the flesh".

Let's look at a few of the key discussions of Jesus' humanity.

The first place that we find a discussion of Jesus Christ as possessing flesh and blood is perhaps the *Book of Hebrews*. The *Book of Hebrews* provides theological discussion about the importance of flesh and blood, and describes Jesus Christ as a "high priest", though the work never provides any details of his life, only discussing him as a "high priest" who has come to sacrifice himself for the world.

Hebrews 9:

6 Such preparations having been made, the priests go continually into the first tabernacle to carry out their ritual duties; 7 but only the high priest goes into the second, and he but once a year, and not without **taking the blood that he offers for himself and for the sins committed unintentionally by the people.** 8 By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary has not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle is still standing. 9 This is a parable of the present time, during which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper, 10 but deal only with food and drink and various baptisms, regulations for the body imposed until the time comes to set things right. 11 **But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things to come,** then through the greater and more perfect tabernacle (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), 12 **he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own**

blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, 14 **how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Holy Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from acts that lead to death, to worship the living God!**

15 For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant. 16 Where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. 17 For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. 18 Hence not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. 19 For when every commandment had been told to all the people by Moses in accordance with the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people, 20 saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you.' 21 And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels used in worship. 22 Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

Here we see the development of the theological reasoning in support of a flesh and blood Christ: "*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.*" This is a concept derived from the Hebrew scriptures, as pointed out in the passage itself, and based on Jewish tradition. Among the Jews, and other people, blood sacrifices were seen an essential part of the interaction with God, and blood itself was seen as essential to form a covenant with God. By this reasoning, Jesus Christ had to shed real blood in order to create a new covenant.

In his *First Apology* one of the first Christian apologists, Justin Martyr, defended the existence of Jesus "in the flesh".

And the first power after God the Father and Lord of all is the Word, who is also the Son; and of Him **we will, in what follows, relate how He took flesh and became man.** For as man did not make the blood of the vine, but God, so it was hereby intimated that the blood should not be of human seed, but of divine power, as we have said above. **And Isaiah, another prophet, foretelling the same things in other words, spoke thus: "A star shall rise out of Jacob, and a flower shall spring from the root of Jesse; and His arm shall the nations**

trust." And a star of light has arisen, and a flower has sprung from the root of Jesse—this Christ. For by the power of God He was conceived by a virgin of the seed of Jacob, who was the father of Judah, who, as we have shown, was the father of the Jews; and Jesse was His forefather according to the oracle, and He was the son of Jacob and Judah according to lineal descent.

- *First Apology*; Justin Martyr, 2nd century

As you can see, his defense of the "flesh" of Christ consists of appeals to Hebrew scriptures. The "proof" of the flesh of Christ here is theological.

In another work, Justin Martyr explained the importance of the flesh of Christ.

If He had no need of the flesh, why did He heal it? And what is most forcible of all, He raised the dead. Why? Was it not to show what the resurrection should be? How then did He raise the dead? Their souls or their bodies? Manifestly both. If the resurrection were only spiritual, it was requisite that He, in raising the dead, should show the body lying apart by itself, and the soul living apart by itself. But now He did not do so, but raised the body, confirming in it the promise of life. **Why did He rise in the flesh in which He suffered, unless to show the resurrection of the flesh? And wishing to confirm this, when His disciples did not know whether to believe He had truly risen in the body, and were looking upon Him and doubting, He said to them, "You have not yet faith, see that it is I;" Luke 24:32, etc. and He let them handle Him, and showed them the prints of the nails in His hands.** And when they were by every kind of proof persuaded that it was Himself, and in the body, they asked Him to eat with them, that they might thus still more accurately ascertain that He had in verity risen bodily; and He did eat honey-comb and fish. **And when He had thus shown them that there is truly a resurrection of the flesh, wishing to show them this also, that it is not impossible for flesh to ascend into heaven (as He had said that our dwelling-place is in heaven), "He was taken up into heaven while they beheld," as He was in the flesh.** If, therefore, after all that has been said, any one demand demonstration of the resurrection, he is in no respect different from the Sadducees, since the resurrection of the flesh is the power of God, and, **being above all reasoning, is established by faith, and seen in works.**

- *On the Resurrection*; Justin Martyr, 2nd century

Here Martyr argues that Christ's existence in the flesh is essential to support the doctrine of resurrection of the flesh (which is present in a few passages in the later Hebrew scriptures, such as *Daniel*). All of Justin Martyr's arguments in support of the fleshy

existence of Jesus Christ go back to the scriptures. They all rely on both interpretations of the Hebrew scriptures and on the accuracy and literal truthfulness of the Gospels. Justin Martyr based his view of the humanity of Jesus on the belief that the Gospels are real history, for the Gospels are his proof.

Irenaeus both defended the humanity of Jesus Christ and commented on the meaning of his humanity.

And inasmuch as the apostle [John] has not pronounced against the very substance of flesh and blood, that it cannot inherit the kingdom of God, **the same apostle has everywhere adopted the term "flesh and blood" with regard to the Lord Jesus Christ, partly indeed to establish His human nature** (for He did Himself speak of Himself as the Son of man), **and partly that He might confirm the salvation of our flesh.** For if the flesh were not in a position to be saved, the Word of God would in no wise have become flesh. And if the blood of the righteous were not to be inquired after, the Lord would certainly not have had blood [in His composition]. But inasmuch as blood cries out from the beginning [of the world], God said to Cain, when he had slain his brother, "The voice of your brother's blood cries to Me." And as their blood will be inquired after, He said to those with Noah, "For your blood of your souls will I require, [even] from the hand of all beasts;" and again, "Whosoever will shed man's blood, it shall be shed for his blood." In like manner, too, did the Lord say to those who should afterwards shed His blood, "All righteous blood shall be required which is shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zacharias the son of Barachias, whom you slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation." **He thus points out the recapitulation that should take place in his own person of the effusion of blood from the beginning,** of all the righteous men and of the prophets, and that by means of Himself there should be a requisition of their blood. **Now this [blood] could not be required unless it also had the capability of being saved; nor would the Lord have summed up these things in Himself, unless He had Himself been made flesh and blood after the way of the original formation [of man], saving in his own person at the end that which had in the beginning perished in Adam.**

- *Against Heresies*; Irenaeus, 2nd century

We see here that Irenaeus makes it clear that the "human nature" of Jesus was something

that had to be "established". Irenaeus goes on to discuss the significance of the human nature of Jesus, which is to support the doctrine of salvation of the flesh and to fulfill scripture. We can see here that Irenaeus' defense of the humanity of Jesus Christ rests on the scriptures and theological reasoning.

Tertullian below makes it clear that the humanity of Jesus was certainly in question, for he asks the question: "*Did it [his flesh] ever exist?*"

They who are so anxious to shake that belief in the resurrection which was firmly settled before the appearance of our modern Sadducees, as even to deny that the expectation thereof has any relation whatever to the flesh, **have great cause for besetting the flesh of Christ also with doubtful questions, as if it either had no existence at all, or possessed a nature altogether different from human flesh.** For they cannot but be apprehensive that, **if it be once determined that Christ's flesh was human, a presumption would immediately arise in opposition to them, that that flesh must by all means rise again, which has already risen in Christ.** Therefore we shall have to guard our belief in the resurrection from the same armory, whence they get their weapons of destruction. Let us examine our Lord's bodily substance, for **about His spiritual nature all are agreed. It is His flesh that is in question. Its verity and quality are the points in dispute. Did it ever exist? whence was it derived? and of what kind was it? If we succeed in demonstrating it, we shall lay down a law for our own resurrection.** Marcion, in order that he might deny the flesh of Christ, denied also His nativity, or else he denied His flesh in order that he might deny His nativity; because, of course, he was afraid that His nativity and His flesh bore mutual testimony to each other's reality, since there is no nativity without flesh, and no flesh without nativity.

- *On the Flesh of Christ*; Tertullian, 3rd century

In making his argument Tertullian accuses those who do not believe in bodily resurrection of having a motive to deny the existence of Christ in the flesh, but of course this only highlights his own motives for proclaiming the flesh of Christ. In reality it is true that both sides in this debate made their arguments along theological grounds. Neither group, the ones who believed in the humanity of Christ nor the ones who didn't, supported their arguments with anything other than scriptures and theological *a priori* arguments.

In the 3rd century Gregory Thaumaturgus set out twelve articles of faith, which he viewed as essential for believers. He considered that those who did not hold these views should be considered "anathema", which means cutoff, cursed, condemned, or exterminated.

If any one says that the body of Christ is uncreated, and refuses to acknowledge that He, being the uncreated Word of God, took the flesh of created humanity and appeared incarnate, even as it is written, let him be anathema.

Explication:

How could the body be said to be uncreated? For the uncreated is the passionless, invulnerable, intangible. **But Christ, on rising from the dead, showed His disciples the print of the nails and the wound made by the spear, and a body that could be handled, although He also had entered among them when the doors were shut, with the view of showing them at once the energy of the divinity and the reality of the body.**

Yet, while being God, He was recognized as man in a natural manner; and while subsisting truly as man, He was also manifested as God by His works.

...

If any one affirms that Christ, just like one of the prophets, assumed the perfect man, and **refuses to acknowledge that, being begotten in the flesh of the Virgin, He became man and was born in Bethlehem, and was brought up in Nazareth, and advanced in age, and on completing the set number of years (appeared in public and) was baptized in the Jordan, and received this testimony from the Father, "This is my beloved Son," even as it is written, let him be anathema.**

Explication:

How could it be said that Christ (the Lord) assumed the perfect man just like one of the prophets, when He, being the Lord Himself, became man by the incarnation effected through the Virgin? **Wherefore it is written, that "the first man was of the earth, earthy."** But whereas he that was formed of the earth returned to the earth, He that became the second man returned to heaven. **And so we read of the "first Adam and the last Adam."** And as it is admitted that the second came by the first according to the flesh, for which reason also Christ is called man and the Son of man; so is the witness given that the second is the Savior of the first, for whose sake He came down from heaven. And as the Word came down from heaven, and was made man, and ascended again to heaven, He is on that account said to be the second Adam from heaven.

...

If any one affirms that Christ assumed the man only in part, and refuses to acknowledge that He was made in all

things like us, apart from sin, let him be anathema.

Explication:

How could one say that Christ assumed the man only in part, when **the Lord Himself says, "I lay down my life, that I might take it again, for the sheep; " and, "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed; " and, "He that eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, has eternal life? "**

- *Twelve Topics on the Faith*; Gregory Thaumaturgus, 3rd century

Here we see several things. The very first article addresses the issue of Christ's existence, stating that those people who do not accept that Christ came to earth in human form are to be considered anathema. Clearly this was a major issue to be addressed. Each of the various defenses of the humanity of Christ that are provided by Thaumaturgus fall back on scripture and theology.

Basil of Caesarea, in the 4th century, wrote a letter to address doubts about the existence of Jesus among a congregation of Christians in Sozopolis, in what is now Turkey.

If, then, the sojourn of the Lord in flesh has never taken place, the Redeemer paid not the fine to death on our behalf, nor through Himself destroyed death's reign. For if what was reigned over by death was not that which was assumed by the Lord, death would not have ceased working his own ends, **nor would the sufferings of the God-bearing flesh have been made our gain; He would not have killed sin in the flesh: we who had died in Adam should not have been made alive in Christ;** the fallen to pieces would not have been framed again; the shattered would not have been set up again; that which by the serpent's trick had been estranged from God would never have been made once more His own. All these boons are undone by those that assert that it was with a heavenly body that the Lord came among us. And if the God-bearing flesh was not ordained to be assumed of the lump of Adam, what need was there of the Holy Virgin?

...

Just as the death which is in the flesh, transmitted to us through Adam, was swallowed up by the Godhead, so was the sin taken away by the righteousness which is in Christ Jesus, so that **in the resurrection we receive back the flesh neither liable to death nor subject to sin.**

- *To the Sozopolitans*; Basil of Caesarea, 4th century

As with other theologians who defended the humanity of Jesus, Basil provided theological reasoning to support the existence of Jesus in the flesh. If Jesus didn't really exist in the flesh, suffer, and die, reasons Basil, then we have no reason to believe in resurrection and

eternal life, therefore we *have* to believe that Jesus existed "in flesh".

These examples, and many more like them, show that even the earliest defenses of the human existence of Jesus never used any supporting evidence from outside the Hebrew scriptures or the Gospels. The only "evidences" for Jesus, even as early as the 2nd century, were supposed prophecies in the Hebrew scriptures (which obviously aren't evidence) and the Gospel writings. It is quite telling that one of the earliest defenses of the existence of Jesus cites the book of Isaiah.

The Development of the Jesus Myth

The question then arises, if Jesus did not exist then how did Christianity and the story of Jesus develop? This is a subject that certainly requires more research and the question cannot yet be answered in full detail, nor may it ever be, but a general outline for this development can be laid out:

1. Development of apocalyptic and messianic traditions in Judaism from the 3rd century BCE to the 1st century CE
2. Fusion of apocalyptic and messianic Judaism with Hellenistic culture
3. Emergence of "Jesus Christ" mystery religion among Hellenistic Jews
4. Development of "flesh" based Christ theology within the mystery religion
5. Writing of allegorical Christ narrative
6. Writing of pseudo-historical Christ narratives
7. Development and defense of historical Christ theology
8. Development of post-canon dogma
9. Elimination of remaining non-historical Christ theologies

Understanding the development of Christianity of course requires an understanding of Jewish history. The Jewish people were, for most of their known history prior to Christianity (and afterwards for that matter until recent times), the oppressed subjects of other people. This had a certain effect on the character of Jewish religion and cosmology. Because of the oppressed nature of the Jews, themes of suffering, saviors, and salvation became important to their culture. Jewish culture was, at the same time, quite fragmented. The "monotheism" of the Jews actually led to quite a bit of internal conflict and we see in the Old Testament many stories about conflicts that arose between the Jewish tribes because some group or person was not worshiping God "correctly" or was worshiping a different god.

Likewise, the Jews developed a very scripturally based religion, unlike many of the religions of the surrounding civilizations, which were less strict in nature. The Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians, for example, have no "Bible" that we can refer to to examine their religious beliefs. These cultures didn't have strictly defined religious beliefs, their religions were instead more open and pertained more to ritual. Religion also played a larger role in Jewish culture than it did in other cultures such as the Greeks. Among the Greeks and Romans law was secular, cosmology and the natural world were understood through philosophy and science, and ethics and morality were also under the domain of philosophy. Among the Jews, however, all of these things fell under the domain of religion, as the Jewish historian Josephus noted in his work *Against Apion*.

Now there are innumerable differences in the particular customs and laws that are among all mankind, which a man may briefly reduce under the following heads: Some legislators have permitted their governments to be under monarchies, others put them under oligarchies, and others

under a republican form; but our legislator had no regard to any of these forms, but he ordained our government to be what, by a strained expression, may be termed a Theocracy, by ascribing the authority and the power to God, and by persuading all the people to have a regard to him, as the author of all the good things that were enjoyed either in common by all mankind, or by each one in particular, and of all that they themselves obtained by praying to him in their greatest difficulties. He informed them that it was impossible to escape God's observation, even in any of our outward actions, or in any of our inward thoughts.

- *Against Apion*; Josephus

Within Jewish literature there were traditions, or tendencies, to reinterpret older stories and to draw references to older stories when writing new stories. There was also a history of writing pseudo-prophetic literature that foretold and "fulfilled" prophecies within the same work, i.e. where the same author wrote of prophecies and then also wrote of their fulfillment. Much of Jewish history is written using prophesy after the fact, where in the telling of the history the actors in the narrative give prophecies and then the narrative plays out those prophecies.

In the 4th century BCE the Jews, who had been semi-independent for about two centuries, were conquered by the Greeks and this began the wider integration of Jewish and Hellenistic culture. From the 6th century BCE through to the 1st century the primary residence of Jews was the region of Israel, but during this whole time Jews also spread throughout the Mediterranean. With the conquest of Alexander the Great integration of Jews into other cultures increased, and the Jewish religion became increasingly weakened through cultural competition and conversion of Jews to other religions.

This process is recoded and discussed in detail in many of the writings of the Hellenistic period, both in scriptures and secular historical documents. One example of this is recorded in the First Book of Maccabees, which documents the conquering of the Jews by Alexander the Great:

11: In those days lawless men came forth from Israel, and misled many, saying, "Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles round about us, for since we separated from them many evils have come upon us."

12: This proposal pleased them,

13: and some of the people eagerly went to the king. He authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles.

14: So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom,

15: and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.

...

41: Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people,

42: and that each should give up his customs.

43: All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion;

- 1 Maccabees written ~ 100 BCE

During the Hellenistic period a wide range of Jewish cultural practices developed, with a whole spectrum of Jewish integration into Hellenistic culture, from some Jews who completely abandoned their traditional religion and culture, to some Jews who partially adopted different religions and cultures while also maintaining some of their traditional beliefs and customs, to some Jews, mostly those living in and around Jerusalem, who maintained strict separation from other cultures and held to their traditional culture and religion. This was an issue of on-going conflict within the Jewish culture, with various Jews criticizing one another for their cultural practices. The Jews who integrated into the other cultures criticized those who did not for being obstinate and backwards, and those who didn't integrate criticized those who did for abandoning their god and their heritage.

In the 2nd century BCE, after Greek interference with Jewish religious practices, Judas Maccabees defeated the local Greek army and established an independent Jewish kingdom, known as the Hasmonean Kingdom, which was a theocracy ruled by members of the Maccabees family. This period of independence lasted less than 100 years, after which the Jews were re-conquered by the Romans and ruled as a semi-autonomous province. King Herod the Great was the first of the Rome-backed Jewish kings who presided over Judea, in concert with Roman governors.

By the 1st century CE Jews had spread throughout much of the Roman Empire, this is what is known as the Jewish diaspora. The dominant language of Jews by this time was Greek, not Hebrew or Aramaic.



Greek was the language that was spoken by virtually all Jews who lived outside of Judea and the surrounding area, and even many Jews in Judea spoke at least some Greek. This is why, starting in the 3rd century BCE, Jews in Alexandria, Egypt began translating the Hebrew scriptures into Greek, a project that was completed in the 1st century BCE producing what is known as the Septuagint, so named because approximately seventy scribes worked on the translation, and legend had it that the translations of all seventy-odd scribes came out exactly the same, word-for-word, thus proving that the work was a flawless translation. In reality, however, not only was the translation flawed, but many Jews knew that it was flawed and in some cases efforts were made by Judean Jews to get some errors corrected but this did not always happen. After its publication the Septuagint became the most widely used scripture among diaspora Jews.

When the Jews were re-conquered by the Romans in the 1st century BCE a new era of apocalyptic and messianic literature and theology emerged.

Below is a timeline outlining some of the major events that relate to the development of Christianity. The dates that many of the written works were produced is uncertain, and in some cases the proposed dates of authorship range by more than 100 years, but best estimates based on scholarship are provided.

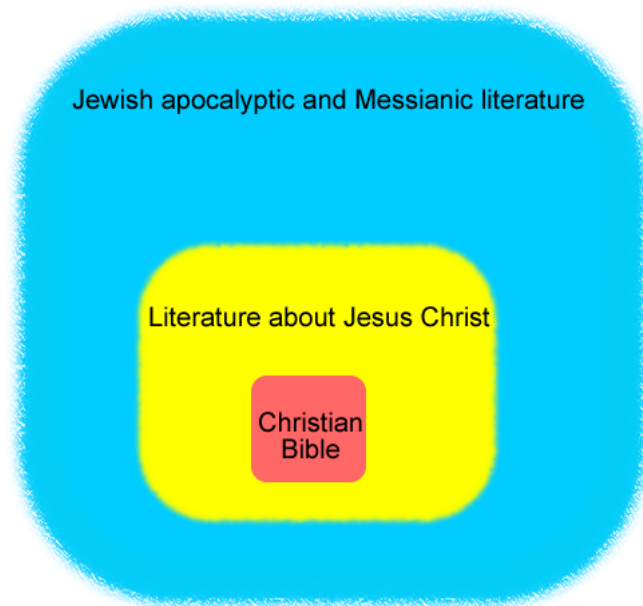
Time	Events
586 BCE	Jews conquered by Babylonians
538 BCE	Jews liberated by Persian King Cyrus
538-332 BCE	Jews ruled by Persians, but fairly autonomous
332 BCE	Jews conquered by Alexander the Great. Beginning of Hellenistic period
~170 BCE	<i>Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach</i> written, book of wisdom sayings influenced by both Greek and Jewish ideas
~170 BCE	<i>Apocalypse of Weeks</i> written, earliest known piece of apocalyptic Jewish literature
~165 BCE	<i>Book of Daniel</i> written (one of the last of the canonical books of the prophets)
165 BCE	Judas Maccabees defeats Greek Army
~150 BCE	<i>Martyrdom of Isaiah</i> written
140 BCE	Hasmonean Kingdom (Israel) established by Maccabees family
~100 BCE - 100 CE	The books of Maccabees written
63 BCE	Judea conquered by Romans

~60 BCE	<i>Wisdom of Solomon</i> written, contains passion narrative that is paraphrased by Mark and Matthew
44 BCE	Death of Julius Caesar – Rome moves towards military dictatorship
37 BCE	Herod declared King of the Jews by Roman authority
20 BCE - 50 CE	Jewish theologian Philo integrates Greek philosophy and Jewish theology
4 BCE- 27/33 CE	Supposed lifetime of Jesus according to Gospels
~0	<i>Apocryphon of Ezekiel</i> written
26-36	Pontius Pilate governor over Judea
36	John the Baptist killed by Herod according to Josephus
~48-64	Letters of Paul written – First mention of "Jesus Christ"
~50	<i>Assumption of Moses</i> written
63	Jewish revolt against Roman authority in Judea
67-70	Judea destroyed by Roman army
~75	Gospel of Mark written
~90-120	Gospel of Matthew and Gospel of Luke written
~90	<i>Apocalypse of Abraham</i> written
~90	<i>Apocalypse of Adam</i> written (independent Gnostic/Jewish salvation story)
~95	<i>Apocalypse of John</i> written
95-98	Josephus writes <i>Antiquity of the Jews</i>
~110	Gospel of John written (or completed)
109	Tacitus writes <i>Annals</i> , refers to Christians being persecuted in Rome in 64 CE
112	Pliny the Younger writes letter to Trajan about Christians
~120	<i>Ascension of Isaiah</i> written
132-135	Bar Kokhba's Revolt (2nd Jewish War) – Bar Kokhba named <i>The Messiah</i> by Jews
~200-300	Economic decline in Rome and period of imperial turmoil
313	Edict of Milan - Constantine allowed freedom of all religions

325	Council of Nicaea - summoned by Constantine to create official Christian (Catholic) doctrine
330	Creation of "Constantine Bible" - Unified "Old" and "New" scriptures
362	Emperor Julian "the Apostate" declares Christianity a fiction created by wicked men
~380	Theodosius declares Catholicism the official state religion of Rome
394	Battle of the Frigidus, Theodosius defeats remaining pagan armies in the Empire, all of Europe now officially Christian

The 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE were periods of immense turmoil for Jews living in Judea, and Jews living throughout the empire were likewise caught up in the politics and strife of the time as well. Some diaspora Jews were very concerned about the goings on in Judea, while others were not. Jews throughout the empire were integrating into Greek and Roman society in a variety of ways and to a variety of degrees. During this time, however, in both Judea and in the diaspora communities, many apocalyptic and messianic works were written, in both Semitic languages and Greek, and many different messianic movements emerged.

Indeed "Christianity", or the cult of "Jesus Christ", was just one small segment of this trend within Hellenistic Judaism. Many Jewish works of this time talk of prophecies, impending doom, and coming saviors. The Christian Bible contains an even smaller subset of the writings about Jesus Christ.



We also know that "mystery religions" were very popular among the Greeks and Romans at this time. We have very little information on the mystery religions partly because many of them were secretive and partly because most of them didn't have written scriptures. Instead, these mystery religions practiced secretive rituals and spoke in parables and riddles. The participants were encouraged to have visions and were exhorted into spiritual ecstasy. It appears very much that what Paul is describing in his letters is just such a mystery religion, where followers report to have visions, receive revelations, follow strict codes of conduct, and engage in secret practices.

A Jesus Christ mystery religion could have existed for an unspecified amount of time without leaving much evidence, for we hardly have any evidence of the other mystery religions either, and aside from Paul we have little or no other evidence for Christ worship during the time of Paul. We also know that Paul repeatedly talks about his "relationship" with Jesus Christ, having seen him after his resurrection, having received his knowledge from him, and having had him revealed to him.

As already discussed, Paul also talked about others seeing Jesus Christ "portrayed" as crucified and as having had visions of his resurrection. The early cult of Jesus Christ, of which Paul was a part, seems very much to have been the product of an intersection between the larger Jewish apocalyptic and messianic movements and the Hellenistic mystery religions. As noted, apostles and disciples are very different things, and the apostles that Paul speaks of are people like himself, people who are part of the messianic mystery religion, not people who have literally "walked hand-in-hand in Jesus".

We have already looked at some of the apocalyptic and messianic Jewish works from shortly prior to the rise of the Jesus story. In those works we have seen that they often involve visions, voyages to heaven, and stories about the Son of man, angels, a coming time of judgment, the end of the world, eternal life, martyrs, passion narratives, and things of this nature - all of the same themes that we find in the story of Jesus Christ.

We have already discussed *The Book of Enoch*. We have noted that the story of Jesus Christ uses many of the themes that are found in *The Book of Enoch* and indeed the *Epistle of Jude* actually quotes from *The Book of Enoch*:

1 Enoch 1:

9 And behold! He cometh with ten thousands of His holy ones to execute judgment upon all, and to destroy all the ungodly; and to convict all flesh of all the works of their ungodliness which they have ungodly committed, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.

Jude:

14 And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints,¹⁵ To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their

ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

Notice that the author of *Jude* states that this was a real prophesy by Enoch recorded back in ancient times, but *The Book of Enoch* was really written in the 2nd century BCE by an unknown apocalyptic author. Clearly early Jewish Christians viewed "Jesus Christ" in the light of these apocalyptic and messianic traditions and may well have believed that these traditions were much more ancient than they really were.

In *The Martyrdom of Isaiah*, written around the 2nd century BCE, Isaiah predicts his own death, his death is caused by evil heavenly rulers, he is accused of being a false prophet but in fact he is a true prophet, he is put on trial and accused of blasphemy, and his passion narrative is like that of Jesus, he is mocked and he did not cry or weep. Obviously this story shows a narrative model that is almost identical to that of the Jesus story.

In the book of 2 Maccabees the killing of the seven brothers was called a "*ransom for the sin of our nation*". We see in this the continuing development of the theme of passion narratives and atonement for the sins of other people through the deaths of men. We also see the expectation of an eternal afterlife.

We can now turn away from the apocalyptic and messianic writings and to other writings and ideas that we find reflected in the Jesus Christ concept. Chief among those ideas are the idea that Christ *is* "the wisdom of God". We find this idea in the writings of Paul and throughout Christian literature, but where might this idea come from? Indeed "wisdom" had long been personified in Jewish literature, though typically as a female. We find a good example of this in the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 8:

1 Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice?

2 On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand;

3 beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out:

4 'To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live.

5 O simple ones, learn prudence; acquire intelligence, you who lack it.

6 Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right;

7 for my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips.

8 All the words of my mouth are righteous; there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.

9 They are all straight to one who understands and right to those who find knowledge.

10 Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge

rather than choice gold;

11 for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.

12 I, wisdom, live with prudence, and I attain knowledge and discretion.

13 The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.

14 I have good advice and sound wisdom; I have insight, I have strength.

15 By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just;

16 by me rulers rule, and nobles, all who govern rightly.

17 I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.

18 Riches and honour are with me, enduring wealth and prosperity.

19 My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield than choice silver.

20 I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice,

21 endowing with wealth those who love me, and filling their treasuries.

22 The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.

23 Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

24 When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water.

25 Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth—

26 when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil.

27 When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,

28 when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep,

29 when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth,

30 then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always,

31 rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

32 'And now, my children, listen to me: happy are those who keep my ways.

33 Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it.

34 Happy is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.

35 For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord;
36 but those who miss me injure themselves; all who hate me love death.'

Here we find a number of ideas associated with wisdom that we later find associated with Jesus Christ, who is called the wisdom of God. Not only do we see wisdom personified here as a being, but in many ways Jesus Christ is also the personification of many of the Jewish ideals. What we see here is a pre-existing tendency in Jewish literature to personify these types of ideals. Paul talks about Christ being the wisdom of God, which has been hidden since "*before time began.*"

1 Corinthians 1:

20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22 Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, **Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.**

1 Corinthians 2:

6 We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 **No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.** 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" – 10 **but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.**

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him?

We find the idea that wisdom was with God during the creation and that wisdom played a role in the creation reflected in the Gospels as well, when the author of Mark calls Jesus a "carpenter", and in the introduction to the Gospel of John.

John 1:

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into

being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

The "Word" here is derived from the Greek word *logos*, which means logic, or reason, or wisdom. It was Philo who integrated this Greek concept of *logos* with Jewish religion and wrote about "Logos" as the origin of creation.

We find the ideas of Proverbs 8:35-36 reflected in other the famous passages of John as well.

John 3:

16 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

17 'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Similar ideas are found in *Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach*, written in the 2nd century BCE.

Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach 24:

3 'I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist.

4 I dwelt in the highest heavens, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud.

5 Alone I compassed the vault of heaven and traversed the depths of the abyss.

6 Over waves of the sea, over all the earth, and over every people and nation I have held sway.

7 Among all these I sought a resting-place; in whose territory should I abide?

8 'Then the Creator of all things gave me a command, and my Creator chose the place for my tent.

He said, "Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance."

9 Before the ages, in the beginning, he created me, and for all the ages I shall not cease to be.

10 In the holy tent I ministered before him, and so I was established in Zion.

11 Thus in the beloved city he gave me a resting-place, and in Jerusalem was my domain.

12 I took root in an honored people, in the portion of the Lord, his heritage.

...

19 'Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my fruits.

20 For the memory of me is sweeter than honey, and the possession of me sweeter than the honeycomb.

21 Those who eat of me will hunger for more, and those who drink of me will thirst for more.

22 Whoever obeys me will not be put to shame, and those who work with me will not sin.'

Again we see the personification of wisdom and themes that are also reflected in the character of Jesus Christ. While not necessarily directly applicable, these are the types of themes and motifs that were a part of the culture from which the story of Jesus emerged.

We now turn to *Wisdom of Solomon*, written some time between the 2nd century BCE and the 1st century CE. Most scholars agree that *Wisdom of Solomon* was written in the 1st century BCE, just shortly before Jesus was supposedly born. *Wisdom of Solomon* is included in some Bibles as a deuterocanonical work. *Wisdom of Solomon* is deuterocanonical because it was originally written in Greek, hence it is not a part of the Hebrew Bible. In fact, the passion story of Jesus is patterned on passages in *Wisdom of Solomon*, as well as on passages from the protocanonical scriptures. *Wisdom of Solomon* states that God created life with the intention that all life be immortal, but that the wicked brought death into the world. The work then goes on to state that those who do not believe in God live for the moment and do not believe in life after death, thus they are sinful and oppress the weak. But, says *Wisdom of Solomon*, the weak shall be protected by the Lord and have eternal reward.

Chapter 1:

1 Love justice, you who judge the earth; think of the LORD in goodness, and seek him in integrity of heart;

2 Because he is found by those who test him not, and he manifests himself to those who do not disbelieve him.

...

16 It was the wicked who with hands and words invited death, considered it a friend, and pined for it, and made a covenant with it, Because they deserve to be in its possession,

Chapter 2:

1 they who said among themselves, thinking not aright:

"Brief and troublous is our lifetime; neither is there any remedy for man's dying, nor is anyone known to have come back from the nether world.

...

12 **Let us beset the just one**, because he is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against our doings, Reproaches us for transgressions of the law and charges us with violations of our training.

13 He professes to have knowledge of God and styles himself a child of the LORD.
14 To us he is the censure of our thoughts; merely to see him is a hardship for us,
15 Because his life is not like other men's, and different are his ways.
16 He judges us debased; he holds aloof from our paths as from things impure. He calls blest the destiny of the just and boasts that God is his Father.
17 **Let us see whether his words be true; let us find out what will happen to him.**
18 **For if the just one be the son of God, he will defend him and deliver him from the hand of his foes.**
19 **With revilement and torture let us put him to the test that we may have proof of his gentleness and try his patience.**
20 **Let us condemn him to a shameful death; for according to his own words, God will take care of him."**
21 These were their thoughts, but they erred; for their wickedness blinded them,
22 And they knew not the hidden counsels of God; **neither did they count on a recompense of holiness nor discern the innocent souls' reward.**
23 For God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made him.
24 But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are in his possession experience it.

...

Chapter 3:

1 But the souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them.
2 They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead; and their passing away was thought an affliction
3 and their going forth from us, utter destruction. But they are in peace.
4 **For if before men, indeed, they be punished, yet is their hope full of immortality;**
- *Wisdom of Solomon*; ~1st century BCE

Compare this to the passion story of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew (or any Gospel). As already noted, much of the passion narrative from the Gospels is based on other scriptures as well, but here we will compare only to the *Wisdom of Solomon*:

Matthew 27:

22 Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus called Messiah?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!"
23 But he said, "Why? What evil has he done?" They only shouted the louder, "Let him be crucified!"

...

39 Those passing by reviled him, shaking their heads
40 and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild
it in three days, save yourself, if you are the Son of God,
(and) come down from the cross!"

41 Likewise the chief priests with the scribes and elders
mocked him and said,

42 "He saved others; he cannot save himself. So he is the
king of Israel! 25 Let him come down from the cross now, and
we will believe in him.

43 He trusted in God; let him deliver him now if he wants
him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

As you can see, the Gospel of Matthew practically quotes *Wisdom of Solomon*, but whereas *Wisdom of Solomon* is talking about a just one and son of God in general terms, the Gospels apply this narrative specifically to Jesus. The closeness of chapters 1 through 3 of *Wisdom of Solomon* to the Gospels has long been recognized by Christians, with early Christian apologists simply calling *Wisdom of Solomon* a prophesy for Jesus.

The dating and significance of the next two works that we will look at are controversial, for there is not agreement as to when they were written or their relationship to the Christian tradition. Indeed this difficulty exists because of the nature of the works. Some scholars who see Gospel themes in these works believe that they must have been written after the Gospels. These works are *The Odes of Solomon* and *Didache*.

First let's look at *The Odes of Solomon*, which is very difficult to date. In fact, Biblical scholars date *The Odes of Solomon* after the writing of the Gospels based primarily on the fact that there are similar themes in *The Odes of Solomon* and the Gospels and scholars assume that the only explanation can be that the Odes copied from the Gospels, but as we shall see, there are good reasons to reject this claim and actually put *The Odes of Solomon* before the Gospels, which could have far-reaching implications for the Gospels.

The Odes of Solomon never mention the name Jesus, and several of the odes are very different from any known Christian ideas. I will present here the odes that contain seemingly Christian themes.

ODE 19:

1 A cup of milk was offered to me: and I drank it in the
sweetness of the delight of the Lord. 2 **The Son is the cup
and He who was milked is the Father: 3 And the Holy Spirit
milked Him: because His breasts were full, and it was
necessary for Him that His milk should be sufficiently
released; 4 And the Holy Spirit opened His bosom and
mingled the milk from the two breasts of the Father and
gave the mixture to the world without their knowing: 5 And
they who receive in its fullness are the ones on the right
hand. 6 The Spirit opened the womb of the Virgin and she
received conception and brought forth; and the Virgin**

became a Mother with many mercies; 7 And she travailed and brought forth a Son, without incurring pain; 8 And because she was not sufficiently prepared, and she had not sought a midwife (for He brought her to bear) she brought forth, as if she were a man, of her own will; 9 And she brought Him forth openly, and acquired Him with great dignity, 10 And loved Him in His swaddling clothes and guarded Him kindly, and showed Him in Majesty. Hallelujah.

ODE 42:

1 I stretched out my hands and approached my Lord: 2 For the stretching of my hands is His sign: 2 My expansion is the outspread tree which was set up on the way of the Righteous One. 4 And I became of no account to those who did not take hold of me and I shall be with those who love me. 5 All my persecutors are dead; and they sought after me who hoped in me, because I was alive: 6 And I rose up and am with them; and I will speak by their mouths. 7 For they have despised those who persecuted them; 8 And I lifted up over them the yoke of my love; 9 Like the arm of the bridegroom over the bride, 10 So was my yoke over those that know me: 11 And as the couch that is spread in the house of the bridegroom and bride, **12 So is my love over those that believe in me. 13 And I was not rejected though I was reckoned to be so. 14 I did not perish, though they devised it against me.** 13 Sheol saw me and was made miserable: 16 Death cast me up and many along with me. 17 I had gall and bitterness, and I went down with him to the utmost of his depth: 18 And the feet and the head he let go, for they were not able to endure my face: 19 And I made a congregation of living men amongst his dead men, and I spake with them by living lips: 20 Because my word shall not be void: 21 **And those who had died ran towards me: and they cried and said, Son of God, have pity on us, and do with us according to thy kindness. 22 And bring us out from the bonds of darkness: and open to us the door by which we shall come out to thee. 23 For we see that our death has not touched thee. 24 Let us also be redeemed with thee: for thou art our Redeemer. 25 And I heard their voice; and my name I sealed upon their heads: 26 For they are free men and they are mine.** Hallelujah.

ODE 24:

1 The Dove fluttered over the Messiah, because He was her head; and she sang over Him and her voice was heard: 2 And the inhabitants were afraid and the sojourners were moved: 3 The birds dropped their wings and all creeping things died in their holes: and the abysses were opened which had

been hidden; and they cried to the Lord like women in travail: 4 And no food was given to them, because it did not belong to them; 5 And they sealed up the abysses with the seal of the Lord. And they perished, in the thought those that had existed from ancient times; 6 For they were corrupt from the beginning; and the end of their corruption was life: 7 And every one of them that was imperfect perished: for it was not possible to give them a word that they might remain: 8 **And the Lord destroyed the imaginations of all them that had not the truth with them.** 9 **For they who in their hearts were lifted up were deficient in wisdom and so they were rejected, because the truth was not with them.** 10 **For the Lord disclosed His way and spread abroad His grace: and those who understood it, know His holiness.** Hallelujah.

ODE 39:

1 **Great rivers are the power of the Lord:** 2 And they carry headlong those who despise Him: and entangle their paths: 3 And they sweep away their fords, and catch their bodies and destroy their lives. 4 For they are more swift than lightning and more rapid, and those who cross them in faith are not moved; 5 **And those who walk on them without blemish shall not be afraid.** 6 **For the sign in them is the Lord; and the sign is the way of those who cross in the name of the Lord;** 7 Put on, therefore the name of the Most High, and know Him and you shall cross without danger, for the rivers will be subject to you. 8 The Lord has bridged them by His word; and He walked and crossed them on foot: 9 **And His footsteps stand firm on the water, and are not injured; they are as firm as a tree that is truly set up.** 10 **And the waves were lifted up on this side and on that, but the footsteps of our Lord Messiah stand firm and are not obliterated and are not defaced.** 11 **And a way has been appointed for those who cross after Him and for those who adhere to the course of faith in Him and worship His name.** Hallelujah.

- *The Odes of Solomon*, ? (Most scholars say after 70 CE due to Gospel parallels)

These are the four main odes that lead scholars to date the work after the Gospels, and perhaps it was written after the Gospels, but there are serious issues to address. The most significant issue, I believe, is in relation to Ode 39. Ode 39 discusses walking on water, and Christian scholars believe that this passage must be patterned after the Gospel accounts of Jesus walking on water. Scholars who believe in the existence of Jesus presume that the story of walking on water in the Gospels was inspired by some real act Jesus performed, and thus this discussion of walking on water would have to be based on

that event, it couldn't be the other way around, but let's take a closer look. Isaiah 43, from the Old Testament, reads as follows:

Isaiah 43:5-6:

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. ... For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;"

Read Ode 39 again. Now, Christian scholars claim that *The Odes of Solomon* were most likely influenced by the Gospel of John, so I will compare this passage to the walking on water account from the Gospel of John, but you are free to compare it against the other Gospels as well, they compare no more favorably.

John 6:

16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, 17 where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. 18 A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. 19 When they had rowed twenty-five or thirty stadia, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified. 20 But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." 21 Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

22 The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. 23 Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. 24 Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

Read Ode 39 again. Clearly, if anything, the Gospel account copies from the ode, not the other way around. The ode is clearly, if anything, based on Isaiah 43, not the Gospel account. The ode talks about rivers, not a lake, and it says nothing about a boat. The passage from Isaiah says that the "*Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior,*" is the one who is with you, and that is certainly enough of a passage to arrive at the notion of the Lord Messiah being with you. There is really no question, Ode 39 is closer to Isaiah 43 than it is to John 6 (or Mark, Matthew, or Luke). If anything, the development of this theme seems to be from Isaiah 43 to Ode 39 to the Gospels, or both the Ode and the Gospels are independently derived from Isaiah 43.

Ode 24, if post-Gospel, deviates from the Gospels and is Gnostic in nature. Ode 42 discusses the stretching out of the hands (basically in the form of a cross) and mentions a tree set upon the way of the "*Righteous One*", but the references are cryptic and the rest of

the passage does not really comply with the Gospel accounts. Ode 19 is even more bizarre, talking about the "milking" of God's breasts and a virgin birth.

Christians are confused by this work because they feel that it has to come after the Gospels, because they realize that the similarities to the story of Jesus are too close for this to have been written before the life of Jesus, but I would argue that the differences between the odes and the Gospels are too much for the odes to have been based on the Gospels or the Christian story, unless it were a highly different version of the Christian story.

The work never mentions the name Jesus and has no solid tie-ins to the Gospels. I would argue that *The Odes of Solomon* are a possible step in the development of the Jesus Myth. The odes may well reflect a set of "pre-Jesus" ideas that later evolved and became a part of the Jesus story. That the ideas in the odes would evolve into the Jesus story seems much more likely than the Jesus story evolving into the odes. This position, however, is of course untenable to those who believe in the reliability of the Gospels.

We can now move on to another controversial work that has received even more attention, *Didache*. *Didache* is a work that was known to some of the early Christian apologists, but was later lost. A copy of *Didache* was rediscovered in the 19th century and the work has puzzled scholars ever since. Scholars do agree that *Didache* as we have it today has had some alterations to it over time, but most also agree that there is still much original in the work as well. Most scholars call *Didache* the oldest non-canon piece of Christian literature, but just how old it is is disputed.

Didache contains many sayings which are similar to those attributed to Jesus in the Gospels, especially in Matthew, but these sayings are not attributed to Jesus in *Didache*. The work is also considered highly Jewish in nature, using several Jewish themes. *Didache* also goes into extensive discussions about rules concerning the treatment of apostles and prophets, making no mention of disciples of Jesus, but rather apostles in general. Unlike *The Odes of Solomon*, however, *Didache* does briefly mention Jesus in two passages dealing with the ritual Thanksgiving meal.

Chapter 9:

1. Now concerning the Thanksgiving [Eucharist], thus give thanks.

2. **First, concerning the cup: We thank you, our Father, for the holy vine of David Your servant, which You made known to us through Jesus Your Servant; to You be the glory for ever.**

3. **And concerning the broken bread: We thank You, our Father, for the life and knowledge which You made known to us through Jesus Your Servant; to You be the glory for ever.**

4. **Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth**

into Your kingdom; for Yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever.

5. But let no one eat or drink of your Thanksgiving [Eucharist], but they who have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord has said, Give not that which is holy to the dogs.

Chapter 10:

1. But after you are filled, thus give thanks:

2. We thank You, holy Father, for Your holy name which You caused to tabernacle in our hearts, **and for the knowledge and faith and immortality, which You made known to us through Jesus Your Servant;** to You be the glory for ever.

3. You, Master almighty, created all things for Your name's sake; You gave food and drink to men for enjoyment, that they might give thanks to You; but to us Thou freely gave spiritual food and drink and life eternal through Your Servant.

4. Before all things we thank You that You are mighty; to You be the glory for ever.

5. Remember, Lord, Your Church, to deliver it from all evil and to make it perfect in Your love, and gather it from the four winds, sanctified for Your kingdom which You have prepared for it; for Yours is the power and the glory for ever.

6. Let grace come, and let this world pass away. Hosanna to the God of David! If any one is holy, let him come; if any one is not so, let him repent. Maran atha. Amen.

7. But permit the prophets to make Thanksgiving as much as they desire.

- *The Didache*, ?(Most scholars date to some time between 50 and 120 CE)

Christian scholar Burton Mack, of the Claremont School of Theology, had this to say about these passages in *Didache*:

The prayer of thanksgiving (eucharist) for the community meal in chapters 9 and 10 are also significant. **That is because they do not contain any reference to the death of Jesus. Accustomed as we are to the memorial supper of the Christ cult and the stories of the last supper in the synoptic gospels, it has been very difficult to imagine early Christians taking meals together for any reason other than to celebrate the death of Jesus according to the Christ myth. But here in the Didache a very formalistic set of prayers is assigned to the cup and the breaking of bread without the slightest association with the death and resurrection of Jesus.** The prayers of thanksgiving are for the food and drink God created for all people and the special, "spiritual" food and drink

that Christians have because of Jesus. **Drinking the cup symbolizes the knowledge these people have that they and Jesus are the "Holy Vine of David," which means that they "belong to Israel."** Eating the bread symbolizes the knowledge these people have of the life and immortality they enjoy by belonging to the kingdom of God made known to them by Jesus, God's child. And it is serious business. No one is allowed to "eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who have been baptized in the Lord's name" (Did. 9:5). We thus have to imagine a highly self-conscious network of congregations that thought of themselves as Christians, had developed a full complement of rituals, had much in common with other Christian groups of centrist persuasions, but continued to cultivate their roots in a Jesus movement where enlightenment ethics made much more sense than the worship of Jesus as the crucified Christ and risen son of God.

- Burton Mack; *Who Wrote the New Testament*

We can compare the passages from *Didache* to the Last Supper meal in the Gospel of Matthew to see the differences between the two:

Matthew 26:

26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

27 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

As with *The Odes of Solomon*, is it more likely that the Gospel account would evolve into what we see in *Didache*, or that what we see in *Didache* would evolve into the Gospel account? *Didache* is a highly Jewish work, which has sayings in it that are similar to those in the Gospels, but not attributed to Jesus, and it contains rituals that cannot conceivably be tied to the Gospel accounts of similar rituals or the Gospel story.

In *Didache* we again see Jesus mentioned *not* as a real flesh and blood entity, but as a spiritual mediator, and the eucharist ritual in *Didache* makes no reference to either the body or blood of Jesus.

Instead the eucharist ritual talks about bread that is scattered over the land and then collected together, which actually sounds very similar to the story of the dismemberment and scattering of the body of Osiris (also symbolized by bread), which was later collected together by Isis and resurrected, though this may just be a coincidence. The eucharist rituals in *Didache* really defy the Gospel account of the Christian story. It's not really

conceivable how these rituals could have been inspired by the life, deeds, and words of Jesus if the Gospel accounts are accurate, which is something that most Christian scholars will not consider, so they instead try to gloss over this issue or explain it away as having been written by confused people. What makes far more sense, however, is that *Didache* represents a step in the evolution of the Christ myth, written by a people who had no concept of a human Jesus who had been on earth, and that these types of eucharistic rituals evolved over time and developed into the rituals that we find in the Gospels, focused on the "body" and "blood" of Christ. It is important to note that a eucharist ritual was also mentioned and practiced by Paul.

Indeed the writings of Paul give us a possible avenue for the development of the later eucharist concept of the bread and wine being literally symbolic of the body and blood of Jesus. Here in *Didache* we see the collection of the bread being associated with the collection of the Church into one body. In 1 Corinthians, where Paul talks about the eucharist ritual, Paul precedes the mention of the ritual with talk about the members of the church being members of the body of Christ. Finally, in the Gospels we are told that the bread represents the literal body of Christ. It seems very much that the eucharist would have started with rituals like what we see in *Didache*, talking about the bread as symbolic of the members of the church, then the idea was introduced that the members of the church were members of the body of Christ, then this ritual evolved into the idea that the bread itself, instead of representing the church, which is the body of Christ, represented the real flesh of a real flesh and blood Christ.

We find precedents even to the to the *Didache* ritual among the Dead Sea Scroll fragments from Qumran.

And [when] they shall assemble for the common [table] [to eat] [and to drink the wine], and when the common table shall be set and [the] wine [poured] for drinking, [no] man [shall extend] his hand to the first [loaf of] bread and the [first cup of wine before the anointed] Priest; for [he shall] bless the first bread and the wine [and extend] his hand first over the bread. Thereafter the Anointed of Israel [shall extend] his hand over the bread; [and then] the entire Congregation [shall make a blessing] [over the food], [each man according] to his dignity. In accord with this statute they shall proceed at every meal at which then men are gathered.

- Qumran cave 1, Sectarian Rule II:17-22

What we see here are rules for a thanksgiving ritual written some time in the 2nd or 1st century BCE in anticipation of a coming messiah. Ritual meals such as this certainly preceded *Didache* and the other Christian eucharist rituals, and it should be easy to see how rituals such as this, perhaps even enacted with an imaginary Messiah, could evolve into rituals like the ones found in *Didache*, the letters of Paul, and the Gospels.

Regardless of *The Odes of Solomon* and *Didache*, we have seen that there was certainly a

developing body of literature and theology within Jewish culture that foreshadowed the story of Jesus Christ. The merger of these apocalyptic and messianic ideas with the Hellenistic mystery religions could certainly have produced the movement of which Paul was a part. The letters of Paul give little indication of a "flesh and blood" Jesus, but later works, such as the *Book of Hebrews*, provide theological reasoning for a "flesh and blood" Jesus. The idea that real blood had to be spilled to create a covenant was introduced, and perhaps the drinking of symbolic blood and the eating of symbolic flesh within the mystery religions also contributed to the development of the need for a Jesus with real blood and real flesh.

Whether the Gospel of Mark was written with these issues in mind is not certain, but after it was written the idea of a flesh and blood Christ suddenly had a form onto which it could attach itself. Indeed, the Gospel of Mark seems to have been written as an allegorical tale, along the very same lines as the other apocalyptic and messianic literature of the Jews. Like the other apocalyptic and messianic stories of the Jews, the Gospel of Mark was based heavily on the scriptures, probably with no second thoughts about it, for this is how such literature was written within that culture.

The reception of the work, however, was a critical factor, because unlike other Jewish apocalyptic and messianic literature, the Gospel of Mark was also widely read by a non-Jewish audience, the "Gentiles" who had been participating in the mystery religion. It is also important to note that most of the apocalyptic and messianic literature prior to the Gospel of Mark was written in Semitic languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, and others, while a distinguishing feature of "Christian" literature is that it was all written in Greek. Non-Jews wouldn't have had the cultural background to understand the nature of these writings, and they perhaps took it too literally, not understanding it as allegorical and based on scripture, but viewing it as real history.

Whether the Gospel of Matthew was written with the intent of portraying it as history is questionable, but it seems that at least the Gospel of Luke was written as a historical document, even though it was based on the Gospel of Mark and other sources.

Following this, in the 2nd century defenders of the "flesh and blood" historical Jesus began to emerge, such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus. These defenders of the flesh, then, immediately set out countering the beliefs of the Gnostics and others whose religious traditions were actually older than theirs. The defenders of the flesh immediately found themselves besieged with many different people who had completely different views of who or what "Jesus Christ" was. The four now canonical Gospels became the key documents for the defense of a flesh and blood historical Jesus and we see that theology and the Gospels are the weapons used in the defense of Jesus' humanity. Pre-Gospel evidence was never appealed to, and yet, even though the defense of the humanity of Jesus began in the 2nd century, this defense began almost as soon as the Gospels were written. In other words, the Gospels were quite new, perhaps less than 20 years old, when they became the primary go-to documents to defend the existence of Jesus. Even when Origen, wrongly it seems, turned to Josephus to defend Jesus, he was still using a source that,

even if it had been accurate, would have only been produced near the end of the 1st century. The defenders of the flesh never appealed to any evidence that was actually from the time of Jesus' life, and this was within 100 to 200 years of his supposed existence.

Various dogmas that are not found in the Gospels were developed by the emerging Catholics, such as the trinity, the doctrine of "fully human and fully divine", the "Father is equal to the Son", etc., and when the Catholics came into power within the Roman State they used their power to eliminate all of the other various beliefs about Jesus Christ, passing down only the view (which it was required to believe) that Jesus Christ had come "in the flesh", suffered, died, and bodily ascended to heaven. Jesus and the cast of Christian characters were then humanized in the traditional manner of Greek and Roman art, the concept of the Christian God was integrated with Greek philosophy, adding concepts such as the omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience of God to the religion, and various aspects of pre-Christian culture were integrated into the religion, such as the celebration of the "birth of Jesus" on December 25th, *The Birthday of the Invincible Sun*.

In the Code of Justinian, produced in the 6th century, we find many of the laws that went into place in the Christian Empire to enforce Catholic doctrine. The Code of Justinian is largely a collection of old laws, many of which had already been in place for some time by the time that the Code was compiled, and which had also been in effect in both the Western and Eastern portions of the Roman Empire.

CONCERNING THE MOST EXALTED TRINITY AND THE CATHOLIC FAITH, AND PROVIDING THAT NO ONE SHALL DARE TO PUBLICLY OPPOSE THEM.

1. The Emperors Gratian, Valentinian, and Theodosius to the people of the City of Constantinople.

We desire that all peoples subject to Our benign Empire shall live under the same religion that the Divine Peter, the Apostle, gave to the Romans, and which the said religion declares was introduced by himself, and which it is well known that the Pontiff Damasus, and Peter, Bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic sanctity, embraced; that is to say, **in accordance with the rules of apostolic discipline and the evangelical doctrine, we should believe that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit constitute a single Deity, endowed with equal majesty, and united in the Holy Trinity.**

(1) **We order all those who follow this law to assume the name of Catholic Christians, and considering others as demented and insane, We order that they shall bear the infamy of heresy; and when the Divine vengeance which they merit has been appeased, they shall afterwards be punished in accordance with Our resentment, which we have acquired from the judgment of Heaven.**

Dated at Thessalonica, on the third of the Kalends of March, during the Consulate of Gratian, Consul for the fifth time, and Theodosius.

2. The Same Emperors to Eutropius, Prætorian Prefect.

Let no place be afforded to heretics for the conduct of their ceremonies, and let no occasion be offered for them to display the insanity of their obstinate minds. Let all persons know that if any privilege has been fraudulently obtained by means of any rescript whatsoever, by persons of this kind, it will not be valid. Let all bodies of heretics be prevented from holding unlawful assemblies, and let the name of the only and the greatest God be celebrated everywhere, and let the observance of the Nicene Creed, recently transmitted by Our ancestors, and firmly established by the testimony and practice of Divine Religion, always remain secure.

(1) Moreover, he who is an adherent of the Nicene Faith, and a true believer in the Catholic religion, should be understood to be one who believes that Almighty God and Christ, the Son of God, are one person, God of God, Light of Light; and let no one, by rejection, dishonor the Holy Spirit, whom we expect, and have received from the Supreme Parent of all things, in whom the sentiment of a pure and undefiled faith flourishes, as well as the belief in the undivided substance of a Holy Trinity, which true believers indicate by the Greek word These things, indeed, do not require further proof, and should be respected.

(2) Let those who do not accept these doctrines cease to apply the name of true religion to their fraudulent belief; and let them be branded with their open crimes, and, having been removed from the threshold of all churches, be utterly excluded from them, as We forbid all heretics to hold unlawful assemblies within cities. If, however, any seditious outbreak should be attempted, We order them to be driven outside the walls of the City, with relentless violence, and We direct that all Catholic churches, throughout the entire world, shall be placed under the control of the orthodox bishops who have embraced the Nicene Creed.

Given at Constantinople, on the fourth of the Ides of January, under the Consulate of Flavius Eucharius and Flavius Syagrius.

...

12. The Same to John, Prætorian Prefect.

We order that Our Divine Decree by which We have ordered that no one who accepts the error of heretics can receive an estate, a legacy, or a trust, shall also apply to the last wills of soldiers, whether they are made under the Common, or military law.

Given, on the Kalends of September, after the Consulate of Lampadius and Orestes, during the second year of the reign of Justinian, 535.

...

CONCERNING THE PAGANS, THEIR SACRIFICES, AND THEIR TEMPLES.

1. The Emperor Constantius to Taurus, Prætorian Prefect.

We have determined that the temples shall be immediately closed in all cities, and access to them forbidden to all, so that permission for further offending may be refused to those who are lost. We also wish everyone to abstain from sacrifices, and if any person should do anything of this kind, he shall be laid low with the avenging sword; and We decree that his property, after having been taken from him, shall be confiscated to the Treasury, and that the Governors of provinces shall also be punished, if they have neglected to suppress these crimes.

Extract from the Novel, "Concerning Statutes and Customs." Section Beginning "Gazarists," Collection 10, Last Constitution.

...

We condemn to infamy, set apart, and banish the Gazarists, the Patarians, the Leonists, the Spheronists, the Arnoldists, the Circumcised and all heretics of both sexes, and of every denomination; declaring that all the property of such persons shall be confiscated, and shall not be restored to them afterwards, so that their children cannot succeed to them; for it is much more serious to give offence to Eternal than to temporal majesty.

(1) Moreover, those who are found to be only liable to suspicion, unless they show by proper repentance that they are innocent, shall, according to the nature of the suspicion and the rank of the person, and in compliance with the orders of the Church, be considered as infamous and banished, so that if they remain in this condition for a year We shall condemn them as heretics.

...

1. The Emperor Constantius and Julian-Cæsar to Thalassius, Prætorian Prefect.

If anyone, after renouncing the venerated Christian faith, should become a Jew, and join their sacrilegious assemblies, We order that, after the accusation has been proved, his property shall be confiscated to the Treasury.

Given at Milan, on the fifth of the Nones of July, during the Consulate of Constantius, Consul for the ninth time, and Julian-Cæsar, Consul for the second time, 357.

- *Code of Justinian*; 529-534 CE

Obviously these types of laws had a profound effect on society and on the understanding of the Christian religion. Only the very narrowest of ideas were allowed to be discussed and believed. All knowledge of other concepts of Jesus were completely erased from the collective memory until The Enlightenment and Modern eras, when some of the older documents were rediscovered or at least published outside of closed circles. Even still, however, by this time the Catholic view had been so solidly imprinted on every aspect of culture and literature and history, that divergence from this view is still mostly unheard of outside of scholarly circles that specifically address the issue of early concepts of Jesus Christ.

In addition, the artistic depiction of Christian figures in Greek and Roman tradition helped to humanize these characters and cement them in people's minds as real living and breathing beings.



Helios surrounded by 12 virgins, 12 disciples, and 12 signs of the zodiac



Jesus with disciples and zodiac



Apollo with halo



Apollo with halo



Christ as the sun-god from tomb in St. Peter's Basilica, discovered in 1942



Early image of Christ with Halo as "The Good Shepherd"



Athens 570 BC Jesus 4th century AD
"The Good Shepherd"



Jesus performing "miracle of loaves and fishes" depicted in royal robes



Zeus - 4th century BCE



Neptune



Dionysus



Jesus Christ



Isis and Horus mosaic from The House of Dionysus



Eirene the goddess of peace holding her son Ploutos



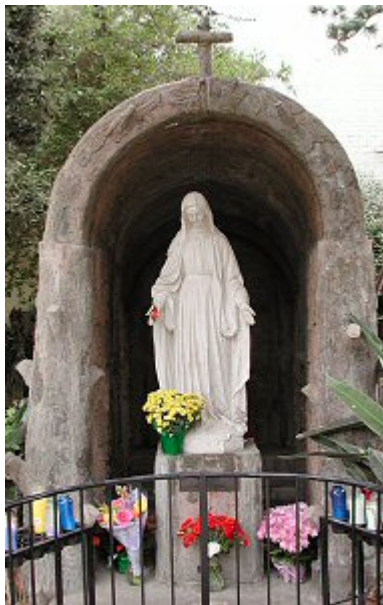
Messalina with Britannicus - 45 CE, based on Eirene and Ploutos



Madonna and child



Diana of Ephesus shrine with blessing hands



Virgin Mary shrine with blessing hands



Diana of Ephesus with moon goddess symbol on head



Virgin Mary standing on moon goddess symbol



Hera Queen of Heaven



Mary Queen of Heaven



Pre-Christian Roman figure of angel



Greek angels of death, Hypnos (sleeping death) and Thanatos (violent death)



Thanatos 325-300 BCE



Archangel Michael



Greek angels from 5th century BCE



Christ Enthroned with angels



Pan chasing shepherd



Pan tempting Aphrodite



Present day depiction of The Devil



Classic Roman image of Mithras killing bull



Classic Medieval Christian image of Samson killing lion



Present day image of Samson killing lion

It's a Fact That the Story of Jesus Is Based On Myth

Whether one believes in the existence of some real person within the story of Jesus or not, it really cannot be said that the story of Jesus is not based on mythology, i.e. that mythology is at the core of the story. The mythology at the core of the Jesus story is Jewish mythology, but mythology nonetheless. During the last few hundred years liberal Christians and secular historians have increasingly dismissed the obviously mythical elements of the Jesus story, viewing them as secondary to some real historical figure. Some of these Christians and historians have dismissed things such as the claims of the coming end of the world, the many miracles of Jesus, and the resurrection. The problem, however, is that these are the real story elements around which the rest of the story is built. These *are* the central elements. This *is* the core of the story.

Modern Christians have also adopted the view that people will "go to heaven" *now* after they die, but nowhere in the New Testament is this supported, in fact the opposite is the case. In all of the New Testament writings the people who are saved by Jesus will go to heaven *after* the coming (or second coming) of Jesus, i.e. the end of the world. In all of the New Testament, aside basically from 2 Peter, the latest book of the Bible, claims of the imminent end of the world are central to the whole story. No one goes to heaven in the New Testament except Jesus, the angels, and perhaps the souls of the people from before the flood, everyone else is trapped in the earth or Hades and waiting for the end of the world, upon which time those who believed in Jesus will be resurrected and taken into the New Jerusalem. So, modern Christianity has really completely warped the entire religion and doesn't even pay attention to the scriptures. A part of this warping is the historization of Jesus and the dismissal of the obviously mythical origins of the whole story.

Even if there were some human Jesus within the Jesus story, that human Jesus is not the core, nor do we have any evidence of his existence, nor is there any need for his existence to explain the development of the religion, and indeed the early stages of the story defy his existence.

The core of the Jesus story is the Son of man, who has been hidden from the beginning of time, who will be revealed when the end of the ages is near, and who will serve as the judge of men and angels when the earth is destroyed and the New Jerusalem of heaven comes as the place of inhabitation for the righteous men of all nations, where death will be abolished and the righteous will live with the Son of man for ever and ever. That is who Christ is and that is who Jesus is, and that figure is a purely mythical character that existed long before the emergence of the specific story of Jesus, whose story is not fundamentally different from a dozen or so other stories from the same time and place, other than the specific name of the savior and the method of his death.

Why was the mode of death crucifixion in the early Jesus story? Because this was the mode of death suffered by the people under the occupation of Rome from which they sought deliverance.

Why was the name Jesus used? Possibly because Yeshua son of Nun was the name of the supposed successor of Moses, about whom popular stories were still being written. Possibly this was related to the widely circulating publication of *Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach*, though we know about the life of this Jesus and it has nothing in common with the Jesus story other than him being considered a wise person. Possibly because of the meaning of the name, which means "Yahweh saves". Or, possibly because the name Jesus was one of the most common names and thus "Jesus Christ" was seen as an "Everyman" name, like G.I. Joe or John Doe, i.e. "Joe Messiah". Jesus was, after all, supposed to be taking on the sins of "every man".

Every act and saying of the Jesus character has precedents in the Hebrew scriptures and non-scriptural writings, either directly or indirectly. This fact is indeed at the core of traditional and conservative Christian belief, yet this very obvious fact is somehow ignored by liberal Christians and secular historians.



Daniel 7:

13 As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven.

Mark 13:

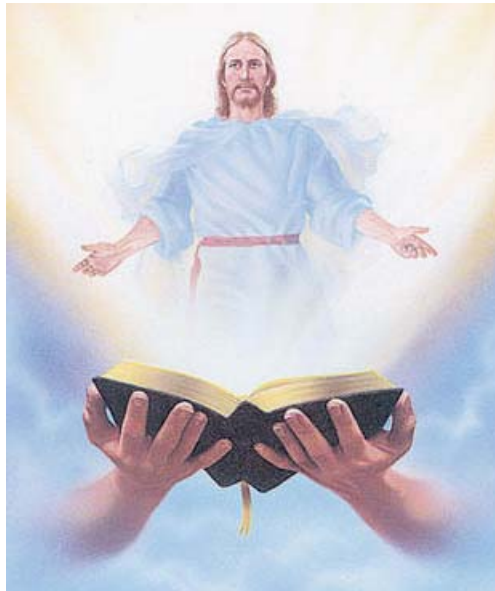
26 Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. 27 Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

To shy away from the obvious roots of the Jesus myth within Jewish mythology is to deny that the ancient Jews had mythology. To deny that mythology is at the core of the Jesus story is to deny the obvious fact that most of the Jesus story existed long before the supposed time of Jesus. To claim that in spite of the preceding mythology the Jesus story may still "be true" or be "based on reality" is to claim that the preceding mythology is not mythology, but in fact literally true and real prophesy.

What we have here is a case where the two best explanations for the Jesus story are the traditional Christian explanation, (that Jesus was the Son of God, did all of the things the scriptures claim him to have done, and that his entire existence was prophesied and his life was an on-going fulfillment of prophecies) and the explanation that the story of Jesus is mythology based on prior scriptures and apocalyptic stories that were popular in the region at the time *and certainly believed by people as true.*

The explanation that actually makes the least sense is the idea that the story of Jesus is based on some mortal person, for which there is no evidence, and the details of whose life we cannot discern for the fact that every detail of the life of Jesus comes from prior scriptures and stories.

The story fits perfectly into the Jewish mythology of the time and place and the only real defense of this story as being based on reality is the claim that, in this case, the pages of the story books really did come to life.



The core problem for the Jesus story is this:

1. If Jesus was the Son of God and the Biblical accounts are accurate, then why is Jesus so glaringly absent from the other historical accounts of the time?
2. If Jesus wasn't the Son of God, but rather just a person, then how did nothing more than a "marginal Jew" become elevated to the status of God so shortly after his death and earthly burial?

That Jesus began as the mythical Son of God in the first place solves both of these problems and is more in line with both the facts and the traditional Christian story than the claim that Jesus was a simple Galilean Jew who later became mythologized.



Conclusion and Summary

The proposition that "Jesus Christ" never existed relies on much more than simply stating that we don't have evidence for his existence or that the Gospels are unbelievable. Showing that the story of Jesus Christ is not based on a person in any meaningful way requires showing that the story of Jesus Christ is better explained as having developed through non-historical methods than it is through historical methods. We can identify literary sources and traditions that are not only capable of providing all of the material for the Jesus story, but indeed it is clear that the Jesus story is developed from these source materials, and this fact undermines the possibility that the stories are based on observed historical events. If the crucifixion of Jesus were based on an observed historical event then we should not expect virtually every line of the crucifixion narrative to come from existing Hebrew scriptures. Not only does the scriptural basis of the Jesus stories undermine their historical credibility, but we also have historical facts, or lack thereof, which corroborate his absence of existence.

The development of the Jesus Christ story is not best explained as merely a "paganization" of Judaism, but rather as part of a Jewish literary tradition. What did set Christianity apart, however, was its crossover status into non-Jewish communities, where Jewish literary traditions were not understood. A combination of factors then led to its growing acceptance. The destruction of Judea left many diaspora Jews in despair and without a grounding for traditional Judaism, so the story of Jesus had appeal to them. Unlike most of the Greek and Roman religions, Christianity was highly evangelical with its claims of salvation and "truth". People living in the Roman Empire had grown up with messages of confidence and strength, but in the 3rd and 4th centuries Rome went through a series of hardships so the Christian story of suffering, redemption, and humility, rooted in the history of Jewish hardships, appealed to a people who were surrounded by religions based on a culture of superiority that was now failing. For those who looked deeper into the religion, many were impressed with the degree to which the life of Jesus seemed to have been so completely foretold by the earlier Hebrew scriptures. The numerous parallels between the Gospels and the "Old Testament" convinced many that the religion "had to be true", how else could one account for so many "fulfilled prophecies"? They declined to understand, however, that the parallels are there because the Gospels are made-up stories based on the Hebrew scriptures. As Christians began filling the ranks of the military in the 4th century Constantine and other emperors had reasons to cater to the religion, and they found that people who were willing to die to spread their religion to new lands made for good soldiers.

For those who claim that the "rapid" (actually over a period of about 200 years) spread of Christianity cannot be explained without a real central Jesus figure, the reality is that even if Jesus were real he played no role in the spread of the religion. We absolutely know that the major spread of the religion happened after the writing of the Gospels. Even the spreading of the religion prior to the Gospels occurred due to apostolistic evangelism, the

works of Paul and other writings are a testament to this. Paul did not interact with one single community that had personally interacted with Jesus. People claim that the apostles wouldn't have gone to such efforts to spread the religion if they had not been certain of the truth of their religion because they had personal contact with Jesus, but Paul himself, the only apostle that we actually do have written records from, is proof that this is false, because we know for a fact that Paul never saw a "flesh and blood" Jesus and Paul emphasized over and over again how important his "revelations" from Jesus were. By all accounts the most active and important apostle that we know of, Paul, never had personal contact with Jesus. Indeed the early geographic distribution of Jesus worship speaks against a single central founder.

Not only can Christianity be explained without a real historical Jesus at its core, but the historical facts that we do have are best explained if Jesus never existed.

One may review the facts that have been presented in this work and come to a different conclusion, but every person who lives in a Christian culture should at least be exposed to this information before adopting the Christian religion and be allowed to make their own decisions about what to believe. The reality, however, is that most people in America and other Christian cultures today are indoctrinated with Christian beliefs from childhood and are never given a fair and unbiased presentation of the facts about the religion. Our schools are silent on this subject for fear of parental backlash, and the churches are obviously not institutions of balanced information in the best interest of an individual's right to make their own decisions. Most churches are institutions of indoctrination that do all that they can to shield their parishioners from information that is different from their doctrines.

Churches and Sunday school teachers do not present fair and balanced information, and sadly most people don't even expect them to. We don't even hold these institutions, which our society presents as paragons of virtue, to any meaningful standard of honesty. Indeed we simply expect that they will be dishonest or at least strongly biased, and still our culture has the audacity to treat these institutions with respect and act as though they are worthy of our administration. No institution that so intentionally restricts and misrepresents information can be worthy of our admiration.

It cannot be said that the current popular beliefs about Jesus Christ are the result of informed opinion. Clearly they are not. Everyone may not come to the conclusion that Jesus is a pure myth based on the relevant facts, but the relevant facts should be openly discussed and become a part of the regular curriculum and public discourse, but both our public institutions and the private media fail to disseminate this information, or indeed actively work against its dissemination.

Addressing "The Lost Tomb of Jesus"

On March 4th, 2007, The Discovery Channel aired a program titled "The Lost Tomb of Jesus", which claimed that the tomb of the Jesus family, including the bones of Jesus Christ, may have been found. The tomb in question contained ten ossuaries, or Jewish "bone boxes", six of which had inscriptions on them. The program upset religious Christians of course, because traditional Christian faith is built on the idea that Jesus Christ was bodily resurrected and bodily ascended to heaven, leaving no remains on earth. Many traditional Christians spoke out in opposition to the presentation and have come out with articles and various presentations to refute claims made in the presentation.

If the bones of Jesus Christ were indeed found that would of course refute the argument Jesus Christ is a purely mythical figure. However, it's not just the traditional Christians who have problems with the claims made in "The Lost Tomb of Jesus" presentation. Indeed, many of the biggest problems with the presentation are not even addressed by traditional Christians, because some of the biggest problems come from the reliance on Christian scriptures and traditions as though they are facts, a problem that traditional tend Christians not to address.

The key Biblical scholar in The Lost Tomb is Dr. James Tabor of the University of North Carolina Religious Studies department. Dr. Tabor takes an extremely historical view of the Gospels and other apocryphal Christian writings and Church traditions. Dr. Tabor tends to take a secular historical view of Jesus in which he maximizes the reliability of Christian writings, basically treating them as reliably and mostly true with the exception of the miracles.

Dr. Tabor has recently authored a book titled *The Jesus Dynasty*, which talks about the historical significance of the family of Jesus. Dr. Tabor is among those who take a view similar to the ideas expressed in *The Da Vinci Code* and *Holy Blood Holy Grail*. Books of this type, generally fiction, propose that Jesus survived the crucifixion and had children, which created a divine bloodline that exists to this day. Some propose that he had children before the crucifixion. Of course, if Jesus wasn't resurrected then I'm not sure why he would still be considered divine or important, but it makes for good sales. So, Dr. Tabor's view of the Gospels is extremely historical and generally uncritical. He sees in them secret codes and conspiracy theories about hidden children, bloodlines, message about Mary Magdalene, etc.

This is the same type of view that was presented in The Lost Tomb, and the problems with this view became apparent almost immediately. One of the first significant claims of the presentation was that the genealogy of Jesus presented in the Gospel of Matthew is his genealogy through Mary and that the genealogy presented in the Gospel of Luke is his genealogy through Joseph.

While there are some Christian fundamentalists who claim this, this claim is not taken seriously by scholars, especially by critical scholars. The genealogies are as follows:

Matthew 1:

- 1 A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham:
- 2 Abraham was the father of Isaac,
Isaac the father of Jacob,
Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,
- 3 Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,
Perez the father of Hezron,
Hezron the father of Ram,
- 4 Ram the father of Amminadab,
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
Nahshon the father of Salmon,
5 Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,
Obed the father of Jesse,
6 and Jesse the father of King David.
David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,
- 7 Solomon the father of Rehoboam,
Rehoboam the father of Abijah,
Abijah the father of Asa,
8 Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,
Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,
Jehoram the father of Uzziah,
9 Uzziah the father of Jotham,
Jotham the father of Ahaz,
Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,
10 Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,
Manasseh the father of Amon,
Amon the father of Josiah,
11 and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.
- 12 After the exile to Babylon:
Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,
Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,
- 13 Zerubbabel the father of Abiud,
Abiud the father of Eliakim,
Eliakim the father of Azor,
- 14 Azor the father of Zadok,
Zadok the father of Akim,
Akim the father of Eliud,
- 15 Eliud the father of Eleazar,
Eleazar the father of Matthan,
Matthan the father of Jacob,
- 16 and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

As you can see, this genealogy is presented as a genealogy of Joseph, not Mary. The genealogy presented in Luke is also a genealogy for Joseph, but it is totally different.

Luke 3:

23 Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph,

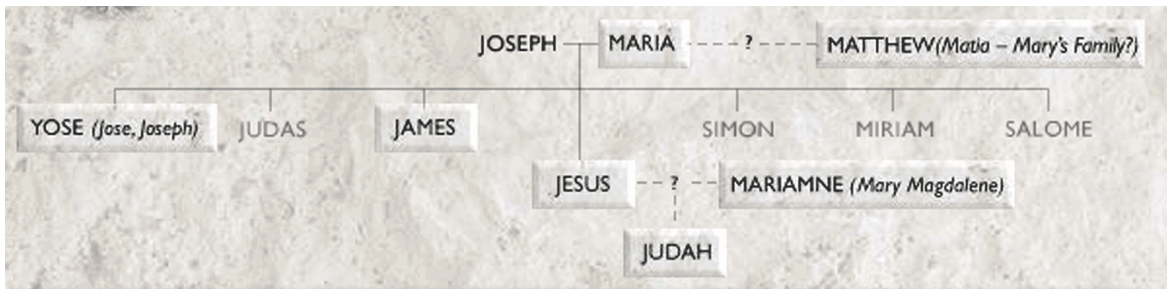
the son of Heli, 24 the son of Matthat,
the son of Levi, the son of Melki,
the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph,
25 the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos,
the son of Nahum, the son of Esli,
the son of Naggai, 26 the son of Maath,
the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein,
the son of Josech, the son of Joda,
27 the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa,
the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel,
the son of Neri, 28 the son of Melki,
the son of Addi, the son of Cosam,
the son of Elmadam, the son of Er,
29 the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer,
the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat,
the son of Levi, 30 the son of Simeon,
the son of Judah, the son of Joseph,
the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim,
31 the son of Melea, the son of Menna,
the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan,
the son of David, 32 the son of Jesse,
the son of Obed, the son of Boaz,
the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon,
33 the son of Amminadab, the son of Ram,
the son of Hezron, the son of Perez,
the son of Judah, 34 the son of Jacob,
the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham,
the son of Terah, the son of Nahor,
35 the son of Serug, the son of Reu,
the son of Peleg, the son of Eber,
the son of Shelah, 36 the son of Cainan,
the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem,
the son of Noah, the son of Lamech,
37 the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch,
the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel,
the son of Kenan, 38 the son of Enosh,
the son of Seth, the son of Adam,
the son of God.

Luke's genealogy is also obviously a genealogy for Joseph. The claim that one genealogy is for Mary and one is for Joseph is merely an apologetic attempt to reconcile the

contradictory genealogies, but no historian should take these genealogies seriously in the first place, since it's obvious that no one could really know the genealogy of Jesus even if he were a real person. The fact that they are totally different from one another is simply a product of the fact that the authors of Matthew and Luke both completely fabricated their genealogies separately from each other. The two different genealogies likely reflect the political allegiances of the authors.

The fact that these genealogies would even be presented as "evidence" in The Lost Tomb shows extremely poor scholarship right off the bat. The only reason that these genealogies were used was in order to try and explain why the name "Matia", or Matthew, appeared among the ossuaries found in the tomb. The claim was that the genealogy presented in Matthew is the genealogy of Mary, and that genealogy contains a lot of "Matthew" type names, so it's conceivable that the name Matia is from a relative of Mary. In reality, these are all simply common names, but in fact this name should be considered a name that does not fit and be viewed as evidence against this tomb being the tomb of "the Jesus family."

The next problem was presented early in the program as well, when they showed a supposed family tree of Jesus, listing out the supposed siblings of Jesus. Among those siblings they listed his supposed sisters Miriam and Salome. From the presentation:



The siblings of Jesus are only listed in two of the Gospels, Mark and Matthew. Neither the the Gospel of Luke nor the Gospel of John name any brothers of Jesus, nor do they mention any sisters. Neither the Gospel of Mark nor the Gospel of Matthew name any of Jesus' sisters either, so where do the names Miriam and Salome come from?

There is no Miriam mentioned in the New Testament at all, and Salome is only mentioned in the the Gospel of Mark, but not as his sister. This is another good example of the confusion of names in the Gospels, and ways in which people attempt to reconcile things by twisting interpretations to try and make things fit together.

Mark 15:

40 Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. 41 In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

In The Lost Tomb they are trying to use this mention of Salome to call Salome a sister of

Jesus, but this is clearly not the case. Almost every woman in the Gospels is named Mary, so keeping the names straight is difficult, and the names James and Joses, or Joseph, are common as well. A part of the other claim that they made in the program was that the name Joses was rare, and that it's only occurrence in the Gospels was as a brother of Jesus, but this is not true. Here a James and Joses are listed not as brothers of Jesus.

The issues here go deeper though, because this is another case of forced interpretation in an attempt to try and reconcile the Gospels. You see, in the Gospel of John it says that Jesus' mother was at the crucifixion, while she is not in the synoptics, where Salome is mentioned.

John 19:

25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," 27 and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Indeed Jesus' family plays almost no role in the synoptics because he rejects them early in the story and they are absent from the rest of it. Jesus' rejection of his family is a major theme in the Gospel of Mark. The reason that Jesus' mother is present at the crucifixion in the Gospel of John has already been explained. She was perhaps added there to make the reference to the "disciple whom Jesus loved" being the person whose later title became "the Lord's brother".

At any rate, Salome is not listed in the Gospels as a sister of Jesus, she is mentioned as the daughter of a different Mary, and is one of the women who anoints his body in the tomb, thus the "family tree" presented in "The Lost Tomb of Jesus" is clearly flawed.

The issue of the "disciple whom Jesus loved" has already been addressed. This is probably referring to James son of Zebedee, if anyone, but Simcha Jacobovici, the writer, director, and producer of The Lost Tomb thinks that "the beloved disciple" is "the son of Jesus"! Not hardly. Dr. Tabor also thinks that Jesus had a son, but Dr. Tabor has suggested that the person who flees naked during the arrest of Jesus may be his son. Dr. Tabor made this suggestion while discussing "The Lost Tomb of Jesus" on the Discovery Channel website, saying:

Simcha is convinced that the Beloved Disciple is the son. I am not so sure, as I still stay with the idea it is James, but I think we need to look. There is also that young man who runs away naked at the arrest of Jesus, only in Mark. Strange story. He was with the group, at the last supper and arrest. Who is he?

Here Dr. Tabor says he thinks that "the beloved disciple" is James, the literal brother of Jesus, not James son of Zebedee. Both of these men focus on ideas revolving around Jesus

having had children and an important extended family.

I believe that I have a better answer to the question of "who" is fleeing naked during the arrest of Jesus though, and it certainly isn't "his son".

The passage in question is from Mark 14.

Mark 14:

10 Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. 11 When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

...

43 Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. 44 Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.' 45 So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, 'Rabbi!' and kissed him. 46 Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. 47 But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 48 Then Jesus said to them, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? 49 Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.' 50 All of them deserted him and fled.

51 A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, 52 but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

The speculation of Dr. Tabor is that this "young man" may be the child of Jesus. Presumably he is thinking that the linen cloth is a kind of diaper that fell off, but this says young man, not infant. Plus, linen was considered an expensive fabric, not something you would make a diaper from. I have already identified the passages in Mark 14 that deal with Judas as relating to Amos 2 from the Old Testament, which is shown in the section titled "Prophecies or Plagiarism?".

Upon seeing Dr. Tabor's claim I decided to see if I could explain who this naked man was based on my view that the Gospel of Mark is an allegory, based on Hebrew scriptures, about the destruction of Judea. The first thing I did was look for the passages that I considered to be the basis for the arrest and betrayal scenes. That led me to Amos 2, and this is what Amos 2 says (The version from the Septuagint, which is what the author of Mark would have been using):

Amos 2:

4 Thus says the Lord; For three sins of the children of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away from him, because they have rejected the law of the Lord, and have not kept His ordinances, and their vain idols which they made, which their fathers followed, caused them to err.

5 And I will send a fire on Judah, and it shall devour the foundations of Jerusalem.

6 Thus says the Lord; for three sins of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away from him, because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for sandals,

7 in which to tread on the dust of the earth, and they have smitten upon the heads of the poor, and have perverted the way of the lowly; and a son and his father have gone into the same maid, that they might profane the name of their God.

8 And binding their clothes with cords, they have made them curtains near the altar, and they have drunk wine gained by extortion in the house of their God.

...

10 And I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and led you about in the desert forty years, that you should inherit the land of the Amorites.

11 And I took of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for consecration. Are not these things so, you sons of Israel? Says the Lord.

12 But you gave the consecrated ones wine to drink, and you commanded the prophets, saying, Prophecy not.

13 Therefore behold, I roll under you, as a wagon full of straw is rolled.

14 And flight shall perish from the runner, and the strong shall not hold fast his strength, and the warrior shall not save his life;

15 and the archer shall not withstand, and he that is swift of foot shall in by no means escape; and the horseman shall not save his life.

16 And the strong shall find no confidence in power: **the naked shall flee away in that day, says the Lord.**

I should note here that I have searched the Old Testament and this is the only passage that talks about people fleeing naked like this. A young man is not a toddler in a diaper, as Dr. Tabor would have it. When the Jesus character says "*let the scriptures be fulfilled,*" that is followed with the fleeing of the naked man, which, if I am correct, means that the fulfillment of the scriptures had a double meaning, meaning the fulfillment of his death, and the fulfillment of the destruction of Israel, as happened in 70 CE. The fleeing of the naked man completes the reference to Amos 2, which starts with Judas selling "the righteous" for silver, who is commanded not to prophecy, and who is later forced to drink wine.

While Dr. Tabor and Simcha Jacobovici, who view the Gospels as historical, are grasping at straws and speculating that Jesus had a child which is secretly hinted at in the Gospels, these so-called mysteries can be answered by acknowledging that the Gospels are not history, instead they are all based on the Gospel of Mark, which is a fabricated allegorical story (and a well written one) that is based on scriptures. If you want to look for the meaning of passages or to understand certain oddities, look at the Hebrew scriptures upon which these symbolic stories are based.

A more specific problem with "Lost Tomb of Jesus" case is the interpretation of the name on the ossuary that they identify as having belonged to "Mary Magdalene". The Lost Tomb presents the translation of the text on this ossuary as "The Master Mariamene". They go further to say that "in reality" Mary Magdalene was one of the major apostles of the early movement and that her role was secretly eliminated. This is based on a later writing called the Gospel of Mary Magdalene, which was probably written in the 2nd century.

The claim by the program is that Mary would have been considered a "Master" by early Christians, however, not only is this doubtful, but the translation itself is doubtful. Other experts translate the writing on this ossuary as "Mariamenon, who is (also called) Mara" or Mariame and Mara, meaning that the bones of two people were in the box, something that was not uncommon. The issues surrounding this translation are complex, because this ossuary is labeled in Greek, not Aramaic like the others. There is nothing unusual about Jewish burial vessels being written on in Greek, in fact it's actually very common, it was more uncommon for them to have been written on in Aramaic. The issue is that the translation presented by The Lost Tomb is based on the idea that the word "Master" is a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic word for master. In other words, it clearly doesn't say master in Greek, but the sounds in Greek are similar to the Aramaic sounds for the word master. So, this is a very tortured translation, but that's not the end of the problems.

They are basing the claim that "Mariamene" is "Mary Magdalene" on one text, the Gospel of Philip, which was written in the 4th century, and contains a character named Mariamene, who is said to be a sister of Philip, but there is nothing in this work that makes it clear that Mariamene is the same person as Mary Magdalene, this is just an assumption. So, when it comes to tying the Mariamene ossuary to Mary Magdalene there are numerous problems.

The program also failed to mention that another ossuary labeled "Jesus son of Joseph" has indeed been found, which is well known. The presentation presumably didn't mention this because this would make the "Jesus son of Joseph" ossuary in their tomb look less special.

"The Lost Tomb of Jesus" presentation further claimed that there was a 10th missing ossuary from the tomb site, and that this ossuary is the "James son of Joseph brother of Jesus" ossuary that was reported in the media in 2002. They claimed to have done tests to prove that the patina on the James ossuary matched the patina on the ossuaries from the Jesus tomb site, but in reality the tests that they performed were not capable of making this connection, and shortly after the film was completed the owner of the James ossuary, Oded Golan, who is currently on trial in Israel regarding this artifact, produced a time stamped picture of the ossuary in question with a date of 1976 on it, which is four years before the so-called Jesus tomb was even uncovered. Therefore, this ossuary cannot possibly have come from that tomb, and in reality there was never a missing ossuary in the first place. There was an uncatalogued ossuary, which was uncatalogued because it had no markings on it. The ossuary is present in the collection, it's just not noted in the catalog.

Given that this James ossuary cannot be considered a part of the grouping, that brings the statistical significance of the names down even further.

All in all what we have is a tomb containing the following ossuaries:

1. Maria
2. Jesus son of Joseph
3. Matia
4. Yose
5. Mariamenon also called Mara /or Mariame and Mara
6. Judah son of Jesus
7. Unmarked
8. Unmarked
9. Unmarked
10. Unmarked

The name Mary, and variants of it, was used by about 25% of the women in Judea at this time. Therefore, finding a tomb with more than one Mary in it is of no surprise at all. Jesus and Joseph, which includes Yose, were also among the most widely used named among men. The names Matia and Judah son of Jesus are outliers that directly contradict this being "the Jesus family". In "The Lost Tomb of Jesus" they admit that Matia may be an outlier, and that Judah is unattested to, so they leave them out of the calculations when developing the statistical significance of the grouping of these names, but in reality these names shouldn't be left out, they should be part of the evidence that undermines the claim. These are names in the tomb that do not fit.

Most important, however, is the fact that there are no records whatsoever of anyone claiming that there was a tomb of Jesus, that the body of Jesus had been buried and was therefore not resurrected, or that Jesus had a child.

The family tomb that was discussed in "The Lost Tomb of Jesus" held ten or eleven people. Even if some of these people were buried at the same time, based on the burial practices of the Jews at this time the tomb would had to have been visited at least six to eight times assuming that some were buried together, and if each person was buried at different times this tomb would had to have been visited a minimum of ten times, and possibly as many as 20 to 30 times for all of the ceremonial activity.

It would be one thing for the body of Jesus to have been secretly buried in some unknown place and then gone unattested to by others and to have remained unreported, but there is no way that this tomb could have been secret, and the external ornamentation on the tomb indicates that it was never intended to be secret. This tomb would likely have been visited about 20 times by several different people each time. Under these circumstances the tomb would certainly have been publicly known.

If a tomb holding the body of Jesus Christ were publicly known it is inconceivable that the tomb would not have been venerated by some people, would not have been discussed in any of the writings of the time, would not have been used as evidence against the claim that Jesus had been bodily resurrected by at least some "heretical" sect or even by anti-Christian Jews, yet there is no evidence for any of this in the historical records, despite the fact that we have detailed accounts of many so-called heretical claims.

"The Lost Tomb of Jesus" presented the followers of Jesus as the people who would have buried Jesus, but how could the people who put Jesus' bones in an ossuary have been the same people claiming that he had risen from the dead? Paul obviously never knew anything about a tomb of Jesus, so regardless of whether or not proponents of the Jesus tomb claim that those same followers could have buried him and also believed in a spiritual resurrection, Paul was in contact with the main apostles and would certainly have known something about his tomb if he were real and a tomb of his had existed and been known to his followers.

Once again, the reason that there were not any early accounts that contradicted the resurrection in the first place is that there was no Jesus at all, and the early Jesus sects were not preaching about something that was even taken as literally or historically true to begin with.

Likewise, the idea that Jesus Christ would have had a child and that there would be no surviving mention of this at all is also unbelievable, and is instead a claim of conspiracy theorists and believers in mystical bloodlines.

While "The Lost Tomb of Jesus" presentation was perhaps convincing to those who were not familiar with the material, the scholarship and information was nevertheless very poor in reality. Many of the objections to the presentation voiced by traditional Christians have likewise been poor and lacking in scholarship or objectivity, but in the end the Christian position on this issue is correct, the evidence does not support the claim that "the tomb of Jesus Christ" has been found, and indeed for reasons that have been laid out within this book, I don't believe that it ever will be.

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The majority of people in the world today assume or believe that Jesus Christ was at the very least a real person. Perhaps he wasn't really "the Messiah", perhaps he was not "The Son of God", and perhaps he didn't actually perform miracles and rise from the dead, but he really was a great moral teacher who traveled around Galilee with followers and got arrested by the Jews and crucified by the Romans right?

Not likely. In fact, a close examination of the evidence shows that the best explanation for the story of "Jesus Christ" is what we call "mythology". The case put forward in the book is that there never was any "Jesus Christ" nor any meaningful real life basis for the story of "Jesus Christ". Like many other religious figures, "Jesus Christ" began as a theological concept, was later used as a character in allegorical stories, and was then historicized as someone whom people believed really existed. The belief in a literal "human" Jesus most likely emerged as eucharist rituals and theology developed around the concept of the "flesh" and "blood" of Christ and these concepts merged allegorical narratives about the figure.

This book closely examines a vast array of evidence and both shows why the evidence contradicts the existence of Jesus, as well as offering explanations for how it came to be believed that Jesus Christ was a historical person who really existed.

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