

- SUMMARY: THE HISTORICAL JESUS -

Q. Is there a “conspiracy,” where the Church is trying to cover up the real story of Jesus?

A. No. For over a century and a half, the Historical Jesus has been rigorously studied by secular academia. The church has no control over their research.

Q. Did Jesus actually exist?

A. Yes. There is a considerable amount of information about Jesus. Mainstream Jesus studies accept, at the very least, that Jesus was born (c. 4-5 BC), was baptized by John the Baptist, and died on a Roman Cross (c. 33 AD). Although seriously considered in the late 19th century, the idea that Jesus never existed is no longer taken seriously by Jesus scholars.

Q. Is the Jesus of the Christian Church a myth compiled from previous mythologies?

B. No. This is another relic of late 19th century Jesus scholarship. It has since been determined that, 1) the best context for understanding Jesus is Judaism, not Greek or Egyptian myths, 2) there is too little time between Jesus’ life and the first New Testament documents for true “myths” to develop, 3) the New Testament documents are written as real history, not myths, 4) the apparent similarities between Jesus and mythical figures evaporate upon closer examination

Q. Are there any reliable sources about Jesus?

A. Yes, the New Testament was written very soon after the life of Jesus, and is recognized as holding the best information about the historical Jesus. Early non-Christian historians such as Josephus and Tassitus also mention Jesus, as well as later Church Fathers and historians

Q. Are the Gnostic Gospels more reliable than the New Testament?

A. No. Mainline scholarship would date the Gnostic Gospels as 2nd, 3rd and 4th century documents, which are derivative of the Canonical Gospels, and contribute very little to our knowledge about the Historical Jesus.¹

Q. Did the church suppress the Gnostic Gospels?

A. No, they simply ignored them. Since they failed the tests of universality, authorship, and orthodoxy, they were never considered by any of the Fathers as being authentic. Not being considered is not the same as being rejected.

There is no evidence of a mass burning event, or a mass suppression of these documents by Constantine. These Gospels were not discussed at Nicaea, or any church council.

Q. Did Jesus become God at Nicaea?

A. No. For the Christians, He was always God, as demonstrated in the New Testament writings and their sources (cf. Phil. 2, 1 Cor. 15:3-11). Actually, He is also worshipped as God in the Gnostic Gospels: but their understanding of what it means to be a god is quite different from the Judaeo Christian understanding.

¹ There are some, including John Dominic Crossan, who propose theories which include pushing the date of the Gnostic gospels back into the first century. Craig A. Evans explains why his ideas lack acceptance in the wider academic world in *Fabricating Jesus*, IVP Books, 2006.

INTRODUCTION

SECTION ONE: Wrap up From Last Class The Conspiracy Theory

The Historical Jesus

1)The First Quest (1800's-1906)

a. Period of "No-Quest" (1906-53)

2)The Second Quest 1953-c1970

3)The Third Quest (1970's-present)

4)Critical Review

SECTION TWO: Six Questions

1) "Did Jesus ever even exist?"

2) "Was Jesus a myth?"

i. Jesus died in AD 30-33

1. Paul's source may date to AD 40, Gal. 1:18, 1 Cor. 15:3-11
2. Paul wrote Galatians in AD 48
3. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in AD 55
4. Mark's sources may date to AD 40-50
5. Mark wrote between AD 55-70
6. Matthew & Luke wrote between AD 60-80
7. John wrote between AD 85-95

viii. With all these dates, we must subtract 33 to get the distance from Jesus to the sources: the time span is incredibly small!

ix. The John Rylands Fragment puts a cap on New Testament

x. *What happened 30 years ago in your community? (Think of events in the mid 80's. Is it reasonable to think we could find good info from that time?)* Studies have shown that myths take centuries to develop

- a. There is a natural resistance to the development of myths while the *real history* of the person is still alive
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1. 1 Cor. 15:6
2. John 19:35, 21:24
3. 2 Peter 1:16

ii. A myth is an actual genre: the New Testament does not fit into the ancient myth genre

1. It claims to be real history
 - a. 2 Peter 1:16
 - b. Luke 1:1-2

2. It contains innumerable historically-verifiable anchor-points

- a. **Luke 3:1-2**

3. It doesn't "feel" like a myth

iii. The stories about Jesus are just a repetition of the ancient myths about dying and rising gods

3) "Are there any reliable sources about Jesus?"

4) "Do the Gnostic Gospels give better information about Jesus?"

a. Note: There are a number of books not accepted in the Canon

i. Apocrypha

ii. Pseudepigrapha

b. Claims: "The Gnostic Gospels are..."

i. ...the first, and most ancient Gospels

ii. ...Are more accurate than the Canonical Gospels

iii. ...Were rediscovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls

iv.Portrayed Jesus as non-divine

v. ...Taught a pagan religion which elevated the "sacred feminine"

vi. Taught that Jesus had a wife

(1 Cor. 9:5)

5) "Did Jesus become God, and the Bible become the Bible, at the Council of Nicea?"

a. Claims:

- i. The divinity of Christ was voted on
- ii. The non-divine gospels (dozens!) were rejected and burned
- iii. All of the major elements of Christian practice, especially the Sabbath, Christmas and Easter, were voted on
- iv. (Implied) The church was corrupted from the influence of Constantine, and the influences of power & wealth

b. Reality:

- i. The Council of Nicea was the first of seven "Ecumenical Councils," presided over by Roman Emperors, and attempting to unify Christianity.
- ii. It is true that the date of Easter was debated
 - 1. This had been an ongoing discussion, which had threatened to split the church in the second century

2. At issue were differences between the solar calendar (used in the Latin West, also known as the Julian Calendar) and the older, lunar calendar used in the west
- iii. Christmas was not debated at this time
- iv. Sunday was not debated at this time
 1. Christians from the very earliest centuries worshipped on Sunday
- v. The divinity of Christ was not debated at this time
 1. The divinity of Christ was never an "in-house debate"
 - a. It was debated between Christians and Jews
 - i. E.g. Justin Martyr, "Dialogues with Trypho"
 - b. It was debated between Christians and Greeks
 - i. E.g. Origen, "Contre Celsus"
 2. However, Christians always worshipped Jesus as God
 - a. Jesus was God in the New Testament
 - b. Jesus was God for the Church Fathers
- vi. The Trinity was debated
 1. The question of exactly how God could be "one," while Jesus was both God and distinct from God, was a very complicated issue!
 2. The main question at the council of Nicea was Arianism
 - a. Some Christians (as well as later Christians) believed that Jesus was *homoousios*, that is, "of the same nature as God," whereas,
 - b. Arians (and modern Jehovah's witnesses) believed that Jesus was *homoiousios*, "of like substance"
 - c. The content of this debate is very pertinent in contemporary discussions with Jehovah's Witnesses, since they represent a contemporary resurrection of ancient Arian ideas
 3. Ultimately, the question was settled through careful examination of the Scriptures, as well as the use of pre-existing creeds (see my paper)
- vii....however, it is simply inaccurate to see any questioning of the divinity of Christ at this time, because *there was no faction at the council of Nicea, or anywhere in the Anti-Nicene Fathers that considered Jesus non-divine*