



The Real Jesus: A Defense of the Historicity and Divinity of Christ

By Jay Rogers and Eric Holmberg

Published September 2008

Ever since the dawn of modern rationalism, skeptics have sought to use textual criticism, archeology and historical reconstructions to uncover the “historical Jesus” — a wise teacher who said many wonderful things, but fulfilled no prophecies, performed no miracles and certainly did not rise from the dead in triumph over sin.

Over the past 100 years, however, startling discoveries in biblical archeology and scholarship have all but vanquished the faulty assumptions of these doubting modernists. Regrettably, these discoveries have often been ignored by the skeptics as well as by the popular media. As a result, the liberal view still holds sway in universities and impacts the culture and even much of the church.

The Real Jesus explodes the myths of these critics and the movies, books and television programs that have popularized their views. Presented in ten parts — perfect for individual, family and classroom study — viewers will be challenged to go deeper in their knowledge of Christ in order to be able to defend their faith and present the truth to a skeptical modern world — that the Jesus of the Gospels is the Jesus of history — “the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). He is the real Jesus.

Speakers include: George Grant, Ted Baehr, Stephen Mansfield, Raymond Ortlund, Phil Kayser, David Lutzweiler, Jay Grimstead, J.P. Holding, and Eric Holmberg.

Ten parts, over two hours of instruction!

Running Time: 130 minutes

OPENING

More than two thousand years ago, there was a Man born contrary to the laws of life. This Man lived in poverty and was reared in obscurity. He did not travel extensively.

He possessed neither wealth nor influence. His relatives were inconspicuous and had neither training nor formal education.

In infancy, He startled a king. In childhood, He puzzled doctors. In manhood, he healed the multitudes without medicine. He ruled the course of nature, walked upon the waves as dry ground, and hushed the sea to sleep.

He never wrote a book. He never founded a school. He never marshaled an army, nor fired a gun. Yet no man in history has more students and soldiers who follow him.

The names of past generals, politicians, scientists, philosophers, and theologians have come and gone. But the name of this Man multiplies more and more. Though time has spread two thousand years, He still lives. His enemies could not destroy Him, and the grave could not hold Him.

He sits on the highest throne of heavenly glory, proclaimed of God, acknowledged by angels, adored by saints, and feared by devils.

He was God before He came into the world, even before the sun, the moon, and the stars began to shine.

He was God when He invaded the earth from heaven at a place called Bethlehem.

He is God today, gloriously enthroned on high.

He is God eternally, forever God.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that our beloved Lord is “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

He *is* the *real* Jesus.

[Adapted from “The Incomparable Christ” and “The Real Jesus.”]

INTRODUCTION

On June 26, 2000, ABC television aired *The Search for Jesus*, a two hour-long special hosted by Peter Jennings. The program took viewers to Israel and interviewed locals, Christian pastors, clergymen and laymen, but Jennings focused mainly on seven experts in the field of researching the *historical* Jesus.

Four out of seven experts interviewed by Jennings hailed from the Jesus Seminar, a group of scholars who make it their life cause to disprove the divinity of Jesus. The other three “experts” interviewed in the program were also skeptics.

There were a few voices of genuine faith in the Jesus of the Bible. But most of the so-called experts were liberal theologians, that is, those who do not believe the Bible to be the inspired and inerrant Word of God. Absent from the program were the great number of well-known and credible historians who have a deep, committed faith in the inerrancy of scripture and the deity of Jesus Christ.

Liberal Theology: The so-called “Higher Criticism”

The Search for Jesus relied almost solely on a school of thought called liberal theology or the Historical Critical Method. At the end of the 19th century, a school of liberal theologians arose in Germany. They were called the higher critics. Their proclaimed goal was to isolate the “historical Jesus” from the “God-man” who has been worshipped and adored by the Church for two millennia.

The divinity of Jesus Christ was presumed to be a myth. His many miraculous works were deemed to be legend. The circumstances of His life, His teachings and works were brought into doubt. The effect of these apostates has grown to the current day as they have stripped layer upon layer from the Jesus of the Bible, until they now have a common man.

The claims of the higher critics are nothing new. In the first and second centuries, early Christians had to deal with ridicule and abuse from Jewish rabbis and intellectual skepticism from Greek scholars and philosophers.

Throughout the early centuries, bold apologists for the Christian faith, such as Irenaeus, Tertullian and Justin Martyr, wrote volumes of practical wisdom defending the Gospel from the attacks of pagan critics. Succeeding centuries gave the Church many other brilliant experts in apologetics. But once Christianity had taken hold of the western world, a new breed of skeptics arose out of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment.

“Voltaire, the noted French infidel who died in 1778, said that in one hundred years from his time, Christianity would be swept from existence and passed into history. But what has happened? Voltaire has passed into history, while the circulation of the Bible continues to increase in almost all parts of the world, carrying blessing wherever it goes” (Sidney Collett, *All About the Bible*).

“Only 50 years after Voltaire’s death, the Geneva Bible Society used his press and house to produce stacks of Bibles” (Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*) a great irony of history!

The early American patriot, Thomas Paine, published *Age of Reason*, a popular book ridiculing Christianity. Although Paine was a Deist and not an atheist, he popularized the theory that the books of the Bible, especially the Gospels, were full of contradictions. This view continues to be popular among scholars even to this day.

In the 1800s, rationalists such as Hermann Samuel Reimarus and David Strauss published sensational works denying the supernatural miracles of the Bible. The philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, who coined the phrase, “God is dead,” is said to have lost his faith around the time he was reading Strauss’s *Life of Jesus Critically Examined*.

The Jesus Seminar: Liberal Theology Repackaged

Most recently there was the Jesus Seminar, a council of liberal theologians who meet twice a year in an attempt to debunk the accuracy of the Gospels. Many of their “discoveries” are simply repeats of what the liberal theologians of the 19th century said. Strangely, these opinions are

rigidly held even though 20th century archaeology and textual criticism has refuted many of their claims.

The Jesus Seminar's attempt to debunk the Gospels as invented history is not based on a thorough examination of the Bible's manuscripts. Unbiased examinations reveal ample evidence that the Gospel accounts are, in fact, historically accurate. But these "experts" are undaunted by facts. Even today, the skeptics continue to spread the error of a "historical Jesus."

Archaeological Evidence for the Validity of the Bible

Liberal scholars up until the time of the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls in 1947 assigned a later date to many books of the Old Testament. They rejected the early date of books that accurately predicted the coming of the Messiah, because so many of the prophecies were fulfilled to the letter.

Since liberals rejected the supernatural in scripture, they presumed there must have been a later date to the writings that accurately described the life of Jesus.

For instance, the second half of Isaiah was deemed to contain forgeries by second century Christians because it contains so many prophecies accurately fulfilled by Jesus' life and mission.

Then one of the main pillars of liberal theology fell in 1947 with the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls including a complete Isaiah scroll.

In his prime time special, Peter Jennings *does* note that Qumran exists.

[Caves of Qumran]

With the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls, we now have an Old Testament in complete form that existed at least 150 years before Christ. All of the books of the Hebrew Bible except Esther are represented in the Dead Sea Scroll collection. Jennings fails to mention this in his documentary.

Jennings fails to mention that the Dead Sea scrolls give us evidence that the Hebrew Bible has been virtually unchanged over thousands of years, including the famous Isaiah scroll that contains many remarkable prophecies about Jesus the Messiah.

[Photo of the Isaiah scroll on display]

For many years, the Higher Critics held that the Bible both the Old Testament and the New Testament had been altered and changed over the years. Therefore, the critics tried to eliminate the myths and discover the *historical* Jesus.

"The Search for Jesus" rejects or ignores all of the archaeological evidence that supports the claims of the Bible. Throughout the special, Jennings ignores the Messianic prophecies of the

Old Testament that were fulfilled by Jesus. He also neglects to examine the overwhelming evidence that the New Testament has come down to us in virtually unaltered form.

Myth #1: The “historical Jesus” is different from the Jesus of the Bible

Here we will briefly examine seven myths of the Higher Critics. Then as we conclude the first part of our presentation, we will outline a strategy for Christians to defend the authority of the Word of God.

Jennings: “Jesus was a real person.” [07:16]

It is good that Jennings admits that Jesus was a real person. Some have tried to make Jesus into a myth. But the evidence that Jesus lived in Judea in the first century is overwhelming. Jesus was a historical person recorded by Christian, Jewish and pagan historians. In fact, there are many well-known non-Christian historians who mention Jesus:

— Tacitus in his *Annals* (c.115 A.D.) mentions that Christ was crucified under Pontius Pilate and gives detailed descriptions of Nero’s persecutions which are also alluded to in several places in the New Testament.

— The correspondence between Pliny the younger and the Roman Emperor Trajan (98-117 A.D.) corroborates the New Testament history including the persecution of the Christians under the Emperor Nero.

— Flavius Josephus (37-100 A.D.), the first century Jewish historian, makes mention of Jesus, John the Baptist and the James, the brother of Jesus.

Scholars note that the New Testament corroborates Josephus in minute detail. Keep in mind that Josephus wrote his history *after* the time of the New Testament. In other words, both sources were written independently, but both agree with each other. So Josephus testifies to the historical reliability of many passages in the New Testament.

We know of many other early references to Christ by pagan writers, but there are also thousands of manuscripts from the first and second centuries written by Christians. The fact that early Christians recorded their own history does not discount their reliability. Christianity is not a religion that has its origin in shadowy legend, but has definite historical roots, strong personalities and a tremendous amount of source documents to prove it.

Other first and second century writers who wrote about Jesus as the Son of God, the promised Messiah and Lord of Creation, are:

— Clement (A.D. c. 30-100) the Bishop of Rome

— The writer of the Epistle of Barnabas (A.D. c. 70-130)

- Polycarp (A.D. 70-155) the Bishop of Smyrna, a student of the Apostle John
- Ignatius (A.D. 35-110) the Bishop of Antioch
- Irenaeus (A.D. 130 -200) the second century Bishop of Lyons
- Tertullian (A.D. 160 -220) a second century apologist
- Clement (A.D. 150 -215) the second century Bishop of Alexandria

Despite the overwhelming testimony from the early centuries that confirm the Gospel stories, the Higher Critics continue to search for a “historical Jesus.”

Contrary to what the liberals of the Jesus Seminar tell us, we have far more than “likelihood” and “possibility” to confirm the reliability of the Gospel stories. We have substantial authentic evidence that the Jesus of history is the same person revealed to us in the Gospel accounts. We have the first and second century apologists who wrote extensively about Jesus and Christianity. Some of these were men who knew the Apostles. There were reliable second-generation historians who were taught by the Apostles who were in turn alive during the ministry of Jesus.

Myth #2: The New Testament was written 100 years after Jesus

Jennings: “There is no reliable evidence about who the authors actually were. It is pretty much agreed that they were not eyewitnesses. In fact, the Gospels were probably written 40 to 100 years after Jesus’ death.” [08:50]

Jennings is simply echoing a popular myth: some of the theologians of the Jesus Seminar have suggested that writers pretending to be Matthew, Mark, Luke and John took a historical person, Jesus of Nazareth, and invented a genealogy and added historical references as time went by thus “improving” the authenticity of their story.

There is no evidence that the earliest manuscripts of the Bible were altered to be more “historic.” In fact, there is proof that little of the New Testament has been altered. If we look at early copies of the New Testament books, we find that there are some differences between variant manuscripts. But these are mainly misspellings and scribal errors in copying small words, prepositions and numbers.

In addition, most modern translations make note of these differences in the form of footnotes. In fact, you could take all the variant readings of the most reliable New Testament manuscripts and fit them all on one page. There is no major Christian doctrine that would be affected or changed by these small differences. Therefore, even with minor textual variations in the older manuscripts, Christians can still view scripture as inerrant and inspired of God.

What of the charge that historical references and stories surrounding Jesus' life were added later on?

The fact is that the Jews recorded exact historical references — the best of all the ancient historians — because they believed that God was trying to teach them something through history. In keeping with this tradition, the writers of the Gospels sought to record accurate historical events surrounding the life of Christ.

In Luke 2:1, we see that Jesus was born in the days when Quirinius was governor of Syria; and when Caesar Augustus was Emperor. In Luke 3:1, we are given the exact year of the beginning of Jesus' ministry: "in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar; Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea; Herod being tetrarch of Galilee; his brother Phillip the tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis; and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene."

These were the rulers of the surrounding countries of Judea in the first century. These are all true persons and places that may be corroborated in other recorded histories.

And what of the charge that the Gospel accounts were written many years after Christ? The higher critics face a huge problem with credibility here. In dating the New Testament in the second century rather than the first, they must ignore the fact that there were a number of late first century and early second century writers who quoted extensively from the New Testament. The Christians of that era already thought of what we know today as the New Testament as being authoritative as scripture.

We have already seen that Christian writers named Clement, Barnabas, and Polycarp wrote about Jesus in the first century. There are other documents as well.

— The Didache, a late first century catechism, quotes extensively from the New Testament.

— Ignatius (A.D. 35-110), the Bishop of Antioch, quotes from 16 New Testament books.

— Irenaeus (A.D. 130 -200), the second century Bishop of Lyons, makes 1,819 references to New Testament scriptures.

— Tertullian (A.D. 160 -220) quotes from the New Testament 7,258 times.

The problem for the higher critics and those searching for a "historical Jesus" is that these people were writing in the late first and second centuries. Since they quote from the New Testament books extensively, we can know that the church in many areas of the Roman Empire had access to all of the New Testament scriptures. So the Gospels must have been written sometime in the first century, during the time of the Apostles.

William Foxwell Albright, one of the world's foremost biblical archaeologists, said: "In my opinion, every book in the New Testament was written by a baptized Jew between the 40s and 80s of the first century A.D. (very probably sometime between about A.D. 50 to 75)."

In the 19th and 20th centuries, there have been thousands of archaeological discoveries of Greek manuscripts of the New Testament that are hundreds of years older than the manuscripts available prior modern times. There are now more than 5,300 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament and 24,000 manuscript portions available for study. In other words, there are more reliable New Testament manuscripts in the original Greek language available for direct translation into modern English today than ever before.

Sir Frederic Kenyon, who was the director and principal librarian of the British Museum, states, “The last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and general integrity of the books in the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.”

Myth #3: There was no virgin birth and Jesus was not born in Bethlehem

Jennings: “We cannot tell you whether or not Jesus is the Son of God, that is a matter of faith. But if you have difficulty with the idea that the Virgin Mary could get pregnant without a man involved, there are a number of ways to explain why in Luke it is written that way.” [24:50]

Jennings: “Some scholars think that Jesus was illegitimate and that the story was a cover-up.” [26:28]

That Jesus was born of a virgin is confirmed by both Matthew and Luke. In his Gospel, Matthew writes that this miracle was a fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14: “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”

The name Immanuel in Hebrew means literally “God-With-Us.” In other words, God himself was to be incarnate in human form. And the miraculous sign would be that He would be born of a virgin.

Now some have said that the word “virgin” in Hebrew can simply mean a maiden or an unmarried woman. The problem with this speculation is the context of Isaiah’s prophecy. A “sign” in the Hebrew language is simply another way of translating the word “miracle.” And the exclamation “Behold!” means to look with wonder. Both Isaiah and the Gospel writers meant to say that the Messiah would be born of a virgin and the witnesses would look in wonder at the event.

Peter Jennings is right about one thing. There is no physical evidence other than the scripture left to us today to determine the miracle of the Incarnation. But not only is the virgin birth called into question, but also the place and circumstances of Jesus’ birth also prophesied in scripture.

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
Are not the least among the rulers of Judah;
For out of you shall come a Ruler
Who will shepherd My people Israel.’”

— Matthew 2:1-6

According to prophecy given hundreds of years before Jesus was born, not only would He be born of a virgin, but He would also be born in the city of David, his forefather, in Bethlehem. Of course, Peter Jennings disagrees.

Jennings: “Luke writes that Joseph and Mary came here to Bethlehem from Nazareth because the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus had ordered a world wide taxation. Now there is no record outside the Gospels that the Emperor Caesar Augustus ordered such a tax. Roman tax records do show that a man is to be taxed where he lives and where he works and Joseph lived and worked in Nazareth. Tax records also show they didn’t count women. And so why would Joseph have brought Mary on this very difficult journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem through the desert especially when she was very pregnant?” [10:33-11:06]

But let’s look at what the Gospel of Luke actually says:

And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. **This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria.** So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered (Luke 2:1-6).

Some translations have the word “taxed” for the Greek word *apographé*, a word that comes from the Greek verb meaning to enroll or to register. What Luke actually wrote is not that Joseph came to Bethlehem “to be taxed,” but that he came “to register” in a census. In the ancient world, a census was often used to assess the amount of able-bodied males eligible for military service.

According to ancient historians, this census was for a renewal of loyalty in the form of an oath of allegiance to Caesar Augustus. In order for the oath to be taken, all adult men had to be registered and actually sign their names to the oath of allegiance.

Josephus states, “The whole Jewish nation took an oath to be faithful to Caesar and to the interests of the king [Herod] ...” He adds that “above 6000 Pharisees refused to swear.” Based on Josephus’ writings, this oath was sworn in the year 3 B.C. This was the census for the taking

of the oath to which Luke refers. The actual census may have been conducted the year before in 4 B.C. which is in accord with most reliable dates for the time of Christ's birth and stay in Bethlehem.

Furthermore, the fact that Josephus knew the number of Pharisees who did not take the oath indicates that some sort of record was made of who did and did not take the oath. This too, seems to prove that a registration or census took place.

Other ancient historians note that the census took place in other parts of the known Roman world as well. An inscription was found in Paphlagonia (a region in North Central Asia Minor) dated to 3 B.C. stating that an oath of obedience was "taken by the inhabitants of Paphlagonia and the Roman businessmen dwelling among them."

The Armenian historian, Moses of Khorene, stated that the native sources he had available showed that in the year of Abgar, king of Armenia in 3 B.C., a census brought Roman agents "to Armenia, bringing the image of Augustus Caesar, which they set up in every temple." (Martin, Ernest L., *The Star That Astonished the World*, ©1996, ASK Publications; Portland, OR, p.185.)

So it is even more amazing that Peter Jennings would sweep aside this evidence only to tell his viewers:

"Now there is no record outside the Gospel that the Emperor Caesar Augustus ordered such a tax."

In order for Jesus to claim to be the Messiah, the Son of God, He would have to be born of a virgin in Bethlehem according to Old Testament prophecies — which brings us to the next claim of the Higher Critics.

Note: For a fascinating look at the historical reliability of the Gospels' nativity accounts, we recommend the Ernest L. Martin's book, The Star That Astonished the World, .

Myth #4: Jesus did not claim to be God

The idea that Jesus did not claim to be God is often put in a more subtle way.

Jennings: "The word Messiah did not mean the Son of God. It simply meant 'the anointed one.'" [34:52]

[INTERVIEWS WITH PANEL OF EXPERTS: "Did Jesus claim to be God?"]

The idea that the Jewish Messiah is God himself is not something that first century Christians made up. The divinity of the Messiah is something we find throughout the Old Testament.

[INTERVIEWS WITH PANEL: "Is the Old Testament Messiah divine?"]

The great Reformed scholar Benjamin Warfield wrote:

It is quite clear, at the outset, that the writers of the New Testament and Christ Himself understood the Old Testament to recognize and to teach that the Messiah was to be of divine nature. For example, they without hesitation support their own assertions of the Deity of Christ by appeals to Old Testament passages in which they find the Deity of the Messiah afore-proclaimed (Dr. Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Divine Messiah In The Old Testament*).

As an example of this, let's look at Psalm 110, which happens to be the most quoted Old Testament passage by New Testament writers.

The Lord said to My Lord, "Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool." Psalm 110:1

Jesus himself brought this prophecy into focus when He confronted the skeptics of his day.

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?"

They said to Him, "The Son of David."

He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying: 'The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool''?"

If David then calls Him "Lord," how is He his Son?" And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore (Matthew 22:41-46).

Let's look at Psalm 110 carefully: God addresses the Son as God. He tells us that the Lord Jesus sits upon God's own throne. We have to ask: Who except God could sit upon God's throne? Jesus sits on God's throne because He always was and always will remain God in every sense of the word.

Myth #5: The Gospels contradict one another and contain fiction

Jennings: "Scholars don't take everything that they read in the New Testament literally because there are four different and sometimes contradictory versions of Jesus' life." [08:30]

Yes, there are differences in the Gospel accounts. Let's begin with the first obvious difference that seems to concern Jennings so much — the story of Jesus birth. First, there are different genealogies of Jesus. The Jews knew that the Messiah was to come from the house of Judah and specifically must be a descendant of David. Up to this point, Matthew and Luke agree with one another.

There could be several reasons why Matthew and Luke contain different genealogical accounts. The church historian Eusebius, writing in the early fourth century, records that separate genealogies appear for the following reason. Jesus had both a biological mother, Mary, and a legal (but not biological) father, Joseph. Matthew records Jesus' genealogy by "law" through his adoptive father, Joseph, and Luke records the genealogy of "nature" through his biological mother, Mary. According to Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, Julius Africanus, a third century church father, explained this alleged contradiction in his Letter to Aristides (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, book I, chapter 7).

[CONTRAST JENNINGS' FOLLOWING CLAIMS WITH THE PANEL OF EXPERTS]

Jennings: "The Gospels give different versions of what happened on the day that Jesus was baptized ... " [48:40]

Jennings: "Historians differ about what happened at the Last Supper. Some people think His whole speech about the Body and Blood was added by the Gospel writers." [1:37:10]

Jennings: "The Jewish leaders take Jesus to Pilate and pressure him before he will pass the sentence. Many historians don't believe it." [1:44:40]

Jennings: "Jesus is not an heroic figure at all until He gets into the hands of all the people who are going to write and embellish him." [1:46:50]

Myth #6: The miracles of the New Testament were invented by the Gospel writers.

Jennings: "Most scholars think these stories were invented by the Gospel writers as advertisements for Christianity in its early years." [1:10:00]

Jennings: "Did Jesus really heal people?" [1:11:20]

[INTERVIEWS WITH PANEL OF EXPERTS: "Did Jesus heal people?" Refer to Mt. 11:2-6]

And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: "The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me" (Mat. 11:2-6 NKJ).

Note that Jesus is declaring himself to be the Messiah, Son of God, by showing John the Baptist that specific prophecy is being fulfilled. Hundreds of years before, Isaiah wrote of the Messiah:

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness and streams in the Arabah (Isaiah 35:5-6).

Myth #7: Jesus never really rose from the dead.

John Dominic Crossan: “Was Jesus even buried at all? ... I feel terribly sympathetic toward the followers of Jesus because I hear hope there and not history.” [1:54:20]

In his book, *The Historical Jesus*, John Dominic Crossan is clear about the agenda behind his attack on the truth of the resurrection. Remember that in Crossan’s mind, the resurrection is not plausible and the Gospel accounts are not reliable. Therefore, he uses historical reconstructions based upon what he believes might have happened. Again, there are no written historical records to back up his claims. Instead, he writes:

If you cannot believe in something produced by reconstruction, you may have nothing left to believe in (John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, p. 426).

Crossan’s attack on the truth of the resurrection, in the big picture, is really attack on the nature of truth itself. According to Crossan, truth fluctuates from generation to generation. He writes:

It is not ... that we find once and for all who the historical Jesus was way back then. It is that each generation and century must redo that historical work and establish its best reconstruction ... it is that Jesus reconstructed in the dialogues, debates, controversies, and the conclusions of contemporary scholarship that challenges faith to see and say how that is for now the Christ, the Lord, the Son of God (John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, p. 217).

In Crossan’s reconstructed version of the story, Jesus death was accidental the type of execution that the oppressive and arbitrary justice of the Romans might carry out on any given day. In the days following the crucifixion, one or more of the Apostles may have invented a story about Jesus’ resurrection from the dead in order to give themselves some credibility. And then some followers of the Apostles, who just happened to be scribes, may have recorded the event as though it were history — another unfortunate accident — according to Crossan.

But Crossan fails to answer some obvious questions: If the resurrection were a hoax, why would there be a Christian movement in the years after Jesus’ death? If Christ’s death were an accident, why would there even be a scribe who would want to record a distorted record of Jesus’ death?

Lacking answers to these questions as well any real evidence for their claims, the scholars of the Jesus Seminar speculate endlessly as to how and why the resurrection story came about.

Jennings: “Some scholars think that the resurrection stories were borrowed from eastern pagan cults called mystery religions.” [1:54:55]

Jennings: “The mystery cults had an influence because the people who wrote the Jesus story took an earlier story and passed it on via Jesus.” [1:55:20]

The writers of the New Testament also mention the “mystery religions” that Peter Jennings refers to here most notably, the Apostles Peter, John and Paul. What is being described here is Gnosticism an eastern cult that had followers the world over at the time of the Roman Empire. At the time of Jesus, even Judaism had succumbed to the effects of the ancient mystery religions.

But do similarities among stories told among cults and mystery religions disprove the resurrection of Jesus? Let’s look at some evidence:

According to the Apostle Paul, writing in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8, there were over 500 eyewitnesses, including the Apostles, who saw Jesus after the resurrection. Many preached the Gospel and a few of them wrote books and testimonies.

There is also the testimony of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in the blood of the martyrs in the first century. Many of the eyewitnesses to Christ’s resurrection died as martyrs for their faith. It would be hard to imagine people dying for what they knew was a fraudulent claim.

[PANEL INTERVIEWS: “What are the evidences for the resurrection?”]

In contrast to this strong evidence, Marcus Borg of the Jesus Seminar states:

“If we don’t understand why he could be executed, then we miss the political passion that animated his mission ... When we turn Jesus’ death instead into the eternal sacrifice for sin that makes our forgiveness possible, then we really set aside that which mattered so much to Him ...” [1:48:45]

The epitome of liberalism is false dichotomy between the social Gospel and eternal salvation. Of course, there is no contradiction between the two.

Christ lived a perfect life, not only as an example for us, but actually according to scripture to be the “second Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45) to fulfill the covenant of righteousness so that His righteousness may be imputed to us.

In Christ’s death we find forgiveness for our sins, not only because he died as a martyr for the truth, but also because He became sin on our behalf. His eternal sacrifice through his death for sin does not in any way obscure the message of His perfect life.

CONCLUSION

Debunking the Myths

Christians in our day do not need to be persuaded to lay aside the historical accounts of Jesus found in the Gospels, in order to find a historical Jesus. Although there is outside evidence, the greatest proof that the Bible is true comes from the Word itself.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:1,14).

The name given to Jesus is the *Word*. The authority of the Word of God comes from the fact that it is the testimony Jesus Christ has given of himself:

“If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true ... I am one who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me.” (John 8:14,18).

The authority of the Word of God does not come from the study of the historical accuracy of the Bible; the study of archaeology to prove the validity of the Bible; or the study of science to prove the account of creation. Instead we believe the authority of the Word because Jesus Christ Himself gave it.

The authority of the Word of God does not come from us being able to prove that it is true. The authority of the Word of God comes from the fact that it is God’s Word. God spoke it; it is truth.

This approach is sometimes called *presuppositionalism*. The authority of the Word of God is presupposed (believed ahead of time). It is the opposite of *evidentialism*, the idea that we must seek to prove that the Bible is true by offering evidence. Evidentialism is not wrong; it is important to defend what we believe. However, it is impossible to “prove” Scripture using evidence from philosophy, history, archaeology, science, and other rational proofs. To do so would be to claim that these proofs have the same infallible authority as God himself.

The Word of God preached is all the evidence that a person needs in order to be saved. We do not need to “prove” the Gospel in order for it to be effective. The Word of God preached is a living and powerful sword that pierces the hearts of its hearers. While the Word preached is the *only* weapon of our warfare, there is already *much* evidence of the truth in natural revelation.

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20).

But the truth preached, not the evidence that the Word is true, is the only effective message of salvation. Paul writes in Romans 3:14: “Let God be true, and every man a liar.”

We should not lay aside the evidence completely. Paul preached a sermon in Athens (Acts 17:23-31), and appealed to evidences that God exists from Greek philosophy. But Paul concluded his Gospel message with this idea:

“Truly these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

Truth is revealed, not by evidence, but by the Word preached. Our problem is not that we lack understanding or need more information. Our problem is that each one of us is a sinner and needs repentance.

The Authority of the Word of God

The authority of the Bible is implied by the fact that we call it: “God’s Word.” *Inspiration* is the means by which the Bible received its authority. The apostolic writings of the New Testament were boldly described in the same authoritative terms that denoted the Old Testament as the Word of God. The New Testament books were called “scripture,” “prophecy,” “the Word of the Lord,” and so on.

[Scroll the following scriptures on screen over the narration in the following two paragraphs]

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1-3).

Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures (2 Peter 3:14-16).

Every book in the New Testament contains some claim to divine authority. The New Testament church read, circulated, collected, and quoted the New Testament books right along with the inspired Scriptures of the Old Testament.

The contemporaries and immediate successors of Jesus’ Apostles recognized the divine origin of the New Testament writings along with the Old. All of the great Fathers of the Christian church from the earliest times held to the divine inspiration of the New Testament. There is a continuous claim for the inspiration of both Old and New Testaments from the time of their composition to the present.

The “New” Skepticism

Of course, skepticism about the Word of God is nothing new. And there have been many great works defending the scriptures written by Christian apologists throughout the centuries. What *is* new to the challenge to divine inspiration of scripture are the voices of doubt coming from those *within* the Church. Only in the past 150 years has Truth been challenged by those professing to be Christians.

It is the attack on the Gospels by those claiming a connection to the church that has garnered the attention of the media. The fact that there is no positive evidence for the liberal critics' "historical Jesus" does not discourage the media from repackaging the claims of the Jesus Seminar.

It is startling that a small group of self-promoting liberals using poor scholarship have been able to focus the power of media attention to convince even sincere Christians that the "Historical Jesus" is the true Christ of the Gospels.

As Dr. James Dunn put it:

The Jesus of cheap scholarship, the Jesus-as-I-personally-like-to-imagine-him, has been zealously promoted through the past decade like a fizzy new drink.

— Dr. James D.G. Dunn, Lightfoot Professor of Divinity, University of Durham

In recent years, there has been a flood of publications depicting some sort of newly discovered secret or scandalous information about Jesus. These books, and the TV programs and news articles that represent their findings, ought to be exposed as nothing more than self-promotion resting on flimsy scholarship.

John Spong, an Episcopal bishop, is a prime example of reductionist thinking on the historical Jesus. His position in books such as, *Born of A Woman: A Bishop Rethinks the Birth of Jesus*, is based on the recurring theme that "what really happened was covered-up" by the first century evangelists. Spong's reading of the story of Mary, the mother of God, is that she was really a teenage girl who was raped and became pregnant with Joseph participating in a cover-up in order to protect her.

Such analysis prompted Dr. Luke Timothy Johnson to respond:

Having a bishop with opinions like these is a bit like hiring a plumber who wants to "rethink pipes."

— Luke Timothy Johnson, Professor at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University

From Jesus' illegitimate birth, it is not a stretch for Spong to argue that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, and that the wedding feast at Cana was really His own wedding.

While conservative Christian scholars have dismissed these creative fantasies as pure fluff, many less discerning folk, who are nevertheless serious inquirers into the Christian faith, are led to believe that the liberals' reconstructed historical Jesus and their version of the origin of Christianity must have a basis in fact.