

Evidence for the Historical Jesus

History and Mythology, Evidence from
Historical Geography and Archaeology

- One major argument against the historicity of the New Testament Jesus has been the similarity of mythological elements found in pagan religions during the same time the early Christian church was active:

If you Christians believe the stories of Jesus' miracles, if you believe the story of Jesus' miraculous birth, if you believe the story that Jesus was raised from the dead and ascended into Heaven, then how can you refuse to believe precisely the same stories when they are told of the other Savior Gods: Herakles, Asklepios, the Dioscuri, Dionysos, and a dozen others I could name?"

Interesting Question...

- Did the early Christians turn a human Jesus into a supernatural figure by borrowing supernatural elements from the mystery religions?

Alleged Mythical Roots of Christianity

- The Taurobolium
 - Suggested as the source of inspiration for Revelation 7:14's "and they have washed their robes ... in the blood of the lamb." and in 1 Peter 1:2 "that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood."
 - A priest walks beneath a wooden structure where a bull, wrapped in flowers, is stabbed, bathing the priest in blood

But there are problems...

- The taurobolium *post-dates* the New Testament writings by almost a hundred years! (A.D. 160)
- At best, it appears that the inspiration for the taurobolium could have come *from* Revelation and 1 Peter, not the other way around.

More Mythical Roots

- Sacrificial Death of Deity
 - Greeks ascribed deity to outstanding individuals
 - Jews, did not
 - ²⁹Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, ³⁰since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.
Rom 3:29-30 (NIV)
 - Therefore remarkable that Palestinian Jews, among them one of their most respected Pharisees would begin proclaiming the deity of one who walked among them.

Fallacies of Mystery Religions

Influencing Christianity

- False Attribution
 - Failing to attribute an episode as an actual historical event
 - Example: Mithraism had a ceremony where a piece of bread and cup of water were placed before initiates
 - Critics will say that the Christian Lord's Supper is a copy of this ritual
 - However, no evidence of Mithraism can be found in Roman literature prior to A.D. 100
 - Excavation of Pompeii, buried in A.D 79 has not found a single image of Mithra

Fallacies of Linking Christianity with Mystery Religions

- Surely there must have been certain myths and superstitions existing in surrounding pagan lands which *could* have shaped Christianity.
- But the evidence shows that early Christian spokesmen steadfastly refused to accept anything contrary to the gospel which had been revealed to them

- Paul and Barnabas healed a lame man then the whole city rushed out raising...
“their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, ‘The gods have become like men and have come down to us.’ ¹²And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. ¹³And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.” Acts 14:11-13 (NASB)
- What an opportunity to borrow from a mystery religion (even if to attract more people to the faith).
- But what happened instead...

- *“¹⁴But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out and saying, ¹⁵‘Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you in order that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them ... ¹⁸And even saying these things, they with difficulty restrained the crowds from offering sacrifices to them.”* Acts 14:14-15, 18 (NASB)
- The fickle multitude was so disappointed, the very next day they were persuaded to stone Paul and leave him for dead outside the gates of the city.

- Unlike the mythical accounts of various “gods”, Jesus was known historical figure
- “Historical geography” seeks to confirm the events recorded in the gospels by comparing those events with the actual geography that existed at that time
 - Reading the gospels, you are left with a sense that someone forging the gospels would have had to had detailed understanding of the historical-geographical context of the times.
 - This would be difficult for a later Gentile writer

Quirinius

- Probably the most difficult apparent historical contradiction having to do with the gospels concerns a census taken when Mary and Joseph had to move from Bethlehem to Nazareth
- Ian Wilson summarizes and castigates Luke as follows:

“And after telling us that the announcement of the births of Jesus and John the Baptist took place in the reign of Herod the Great, who is known to have died in 4 B.C., the Luke author tries to offer a piece of impressive historical detail:

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. ²This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. Luke 2:1-3 (NASB)

“Unfortunately, while the first-ever census among Jews did indeed take place during Quirinius’ governorship, this did not and could not have happened until at least 6 A.D., the first year that Judaea came under direct Roman rule, and it was reliably recorded by Josephus as an unprecedented event of that year. To put it bluntly, Luke has resorted to invention.”

- *Points of Agreement with Ian Wilson*
 - Both Matthew and Luke agree that Jesus was born before the end of the reign of Herod the Great
 - It has been established with reasonable accuracy that Herod's death took place in March or April of 4 B.C.
 - A census took place under Quirinius in 6 A.D.
- *Points of Disagreement with Ian Wilson*
 - The census of 6 A.D. was not the *first* census under Quirinius

- Acts 5:37 *“After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of **the census** ...”*
 - Luke calls this “the census”, i.e., the well known one of A.D. 6
 - If Acts 5:37 says “the census”, what is “*the first census*” mentioned in Luke 2:2 then? Did Luke, writing Acts 5:37 forget about what he said in Luke 2:2?
 - Literally translated from the Greek, Luke 2:2 reads: *“This census, a first one, coming to pass when Quirinius is ruling/leading Syria.”*
 - Luke is deliberately drawing attention to the fact that this census is not the well known one of A.D. 6

- *“Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry.”* Luke 3:23 (NIV)
 - This happened shortly after John the Baptist began his:

“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert.” Luke 3:1-2 (NIV)
 - The *“the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar”* can be dated to A.D. 27 to 29, and if Jesus were born in A.D. 6, then he would have been 21 or 23, not 30.

- But we know the governors of Syria from 12 B.C. to 4 B.C. and according to those records, Quirinius wasn't governor during that time:

“²This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.” Luke 2:2 (NIV)

- We do know that Quirinius was a decorated military leader of the highest rank and had held several positions in and around Syria from 12 B.C. to A.D. 1
 - Awarded the “Distinction of Triumph” after capturing 4000 prisoners during the Homanadensian War.
 - Elected honorary duumvir by colony of Pisidian Antioch

- It is likely that Quirinius held a ruling position over Syria by special commission.
 - “*while Quirinius was governor of Syria.*”
Luke’s use of the Greek word ἡγεμονεύω **hēgemoneuō**; *to command* doesn’t mean he was the official governor, only that he was in some way taking command or leading Syria

- Luke has been found to precisely identify officials, even when their names changed frequently
 - Cyprus changed from imperial province to senatorial province
 - Luke correctly identifies Serios Paullus as “proconsul” rather than his old title of “imperial legate”

- Luke also correctly identifies the governors of Achaia and Asia as proconsuls since they were under the senate's jurisdiction, rather than the emperor.
 - Achaia was first under the senate from 27 B.C. to A.D. 15, then under the emperor until 44 and again under the senate from that time on
- Luke's term "praetors" for the chief magistrates reflects a particular egotistical practice confirmed by Cicero "although they are called duumvirs in other colonies, these men wish to be called praetors."

- Regarding Quirinius, “...Luke is the only ancient author to preserve the term “politarches” (Act 17:6). This title was later discovered in nineteen separate inscriptions attesting the title in Thessalonica and Macedonia generally.”

Hayes, David J., *The Roman Census and Jesus' Birth*, 1973

- In Acts 28:7, Luke calls Publius “the first man of the island,” a title confirmed by Greek and Latin inscriptions as the correct reference to the ruler of Malta at that time.

- While Matthew and Mark record the popular designation for Herod Antipas as “King,” Luke refers to him by his official title of “tetrarch.” As much as Antipas desired it, the Romans granted royal status only to his father, Herod the Great, and not to him.

- Critics used to charge Luke with an error in Luke 3:1

*“Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and **Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene,**”*

Luke 3:1 (NASB)

- The only Lysanias of Abilene known to modern historians until recently was a “king” by that name, one who was executed by Mark Anthony in 34 B.C. But an inscription referring to “Lysanias the tetrarch,” a ruler from A.D. 14 to 29, was discovered.

New Testament, 1915

Ramsay, W.M. *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the*

Herod I (the Great)

- *“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”* ³*When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him...* ¹⁶*Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi.”* Matthew 2:2-3, 16 (NASB)

- Josephus, in books 17 and 18 of his *Antiquities*, details how troubled Jerusalem became as Herod neared the end of his life. This troubling was confirmed in Matthew:

³When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him... Matthew 2:3 (NASB)

- While we don't (today) have any extrabiblical confirmation of Herod calling for the slaughter of babies, but near the end of his life, Herod had 3 of his sons killed out of suspicion that they sought to overthrow his kingdom. . At the least, archeology confirms he had the capability of doing such a thing.

Pontius Pilate

- Until 1961 the only historical references to Pontius Pilate were secondary, in other words, it was thought that references made of him were because the gospels mentioned him.
- Then two Italian archeologists digging in the port city of Caesarea, found a 2 x 3 foot inscription in Latin “Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea, has presented the Tiberium to the Caesareans.”

Nazareth

- Joshua 19:10-15 lists the towns of the tribe of Zebulum. The city of Nazareth does not appear among them.
- Josephus gives the name of 45 towns and villages in Galilee, but Nazareth is not among them.
- The *Talmud* names 63 towns. No Nazareth.
- Then in 1962 a discovery is made...

- During Michael Avi-Yonah's excavations at Caesarea, the last two fragments of a three fragment inscription were found. It is known as the Nazareth inscription since it is the first known inscriptions citing the name "Nazareth".
- It provides incontestable evidence of the existence of the town of Nazareth in the first century A.D.

Millstones

- Excavations at Capernaum unearthed a *significant* number of millstones. So many, in fact, that it appears that inhabitants there took advantage of the plentiful volcanic rock to make and export millstones
- Jesus, teaching in Capernaum made reference to them:
*“When they came to Capernaum, ... ⁶but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a **heavy millstone** hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”* Matthew 17:24, 18:6 (NASB)

Stone Water Pots

“Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each.”

John 2:6 (NASB)

- During excavations of the Upper City of Jerusalem, stone vessels continually surfaced with the “Second Temple Period”, specifically 20 B.C. to A.D. 70. Not before and not after.

“The discovery of stone vessels became a routine matter... Generally, these vessels are accompanied by traces of fire, obviously from the destruction of A.D. 70”

Avigad, Nahman. *Discovering Jerusalem*

Seat of Moses

“Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, ²saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses;” Matthew 23:1-2 (NASB)

- The seat of Moses was not just a figurative term. At Chorazin, En-Gedi and Delos, carved stone seats of Moses have been found. The teacher in a synagogue would teach from this chair. The seat at Chroazin has an Aramaic inscription on its façade indicating it as the most common language during the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D.

Crucifixion

- According to ancient literary sources, tens of thousands of people died as victims to crucifixion throughout the Roman Empire.
- Until 1968, however, no victim of crucifixion had ever been verified by remains discovered by archaeologists.
 - In June 1968, four cave-tombs were discovered holding the bones of 35 individuals.
 - One ossuary, inscribed with the name Yohanan Ben Ha'galgal, held the bones of an adult male and a child. Concerning the male, Dr. N. Haas of the Department of Anatomy of the Hebrew University and the Hadassah Medical School reports:
“Both heel bones were found to be transfixed by a large iron nail. The shins were found to be intentionally broken. Death caused by crucifixion.”

Gospel of John

- Written with more imagery than the synoptic Gospels; “the light of life”, “the children of light”, “walking in darkness”, “eternal life”
- Originally dismissed by critics as influenced by Hellenistic writers.
- Dead Sea Scrolls shows that phrases and imagery such as this was distinctively Jewish before the time of John

Summary

- Biblical events previously dismissed as false were proven as new archaeological evidence of Herod, Pilate, Nazareth, Capernaum, millstones, stone water pots, Seat of Moses, the Temple, crucifixion, the Dead Sea Scrolls and much more (Pool of Bethesda, discovery of a Galilean Boat, Phylacteries, burial tombs, Sycamore Trees in Jericho and the Pool of Siloam) were discovered.
- No event in the Bible has ever been disproved by archaeological evidence.

Appendix

More Mythical Roots

- Baptism
 - Ceremonial washings have been observed as a means of purification by religions all over the world and from long before the time Jesus
 - Therefore, it has been suggested that Christians copied baptism from the pagan religions around them.
 - But Christian baptism is an identification with Jesus of his death, burial and resurrection
 - Nowhere in the mystery religions is the symbolism of death present in their “baptism” rituals

More Mythical Roots

- Resurrection

- Isis and Osiris

- Osiris murdered by his brother Seth. Isis his wife (goddess of heaven, earth, sea and the unseen world below) discovers his body and returns it to Egypt. Seth regains the body and cuts it into 14 pieces, scattering it abroad. After Isis gathered the pieces, Osiris became “Lord of the Underworld.”
 - Resurrection? No. Osiris is still in the ground as “it was the pious desire of devotees to be buried in the same ground where, according to local tradition, the body of Osiris was still lying.” Nash, Ronald, *Christianity and the Hellenistic World*, 1984

More Mythical Roots

- Resurrection
 - No evidence of reports of “resurrection” of Osiris (or Adonis or Attis) prior to the second century A.D.
 - Again, as with the Taurobolium, it appears that other references to bodily resurrection (as we describe resurrection), post-date Christianity. If any religion borrowed, it was the pagans from the Christians

More Mythical Roots

- Rebirth
 - Only one reference to “rebirth” attached to the religion of Cybele and Attis. Reference dated to the *fourth century A.D.*
 - Reference to rebirth in Mithraism, dated to late 2nd century A.D.
 - Reference to rebirth in taurobolium dated to A.D. 376

More Mythical Roots

Differences in Jesus' sacrificial death

1. None of the “savior gods” died for someone else
2. Only Jesus died for sin
3. Jesus died once and for all, versus mystery gods who were vegetation deities whose repeated death and resuscitation depict the annual cycle of nature.
4. Jesus' death was a historical event.
5. Jesus died voluntarily
6. Jesus' death was a triumph, not a defeat

More Mythical Roots

- Miracles

- Apollonius of Tyana, sometimes called the “pagan Christ” was alleged to have performed many of the same kinds of miracles that Jesus performed.
- We will cover miracles in detail in a separate session, but in summary note there are large differences between the miracles contained in ancient mythology and those of the Bible.

“The immoral and sometimes almost idiotic interferences attributed to gods in pagan stories, even if they had a trace of historical evidence, could be accepted only on the condition of our accepting a wholly meaningless universe.” Lewis, C.S., *Miracles*, 1960

Fallacies of Mystery Religions Influencing Christianity

- Fallacy 1: Combinationalism or Universalism
 - Technique of combining characteristics of all mystery religions from the 15th century B.C. up to the fifth century A.D.
 - If something true from 1500 B.C. ceased to be in 1000 B.C, that extinct aspect probably won't strongly influence Christianity in the first century A.D.

Fallacies of Mystery Religions

Influencing Christianity

- Fallacy 2: Coloring the Evidence
 - Using Christian terminology to describe pagan beliefs and practices
 - Example: *Mystery Religions in the Ancient World* draws a parallel between Christian terminology and the *criobolium*. This book states that the *criobolium* represents a blood “baptism” in which the initiate is “washed in the blood of the lamb.”
 - The *criobolium* is the same as the taurobolium except rams were used instead of bulls, and as with the taurobolium, postdates Christian sources.

Fallacies of Mystery Religions Influencing Christianity

- Fallacy 3: Oversimplification
 - Parallels are made by taking very broad license with the material
 - Example: “Resurrection” stories (Osiris or Adonis or Attis) turn out not to be resurrections (those bodies stayed in the ground!)

Fallacies of Mystery Religions

Influencing Christianity

- Fallacy 4: Who Influences Whom?
 - As we've seen, many of the pagan religions copied terminology and elements of the Christian faith. Why would they do this?
 - Perhaps the reason was an attempt to adopt elements of this popular new religion in an attempt to stem the tide of losses in their own religion?

Fallacies of Mystery Religions

Influencing Christianity

- Fallacy 4: Who Influences Whom?

- Pagan religions were losing adherents

²³About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. ²⁴A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen. ²⁵He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: “Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. ²⁶And you see and hear how this fellow ***Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people*** here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. ²⁷There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.” Acts 19:23-27 (NIV)

Fallacies of Mystery Religions

Influencing Christianity

- Fallacy 6: Failing to Recognize the “Pedagogy of God”
 - Would God reveal himself to pagan people in preparation to receive the gospel?
 - One of the thrilling discoveries of Christian missionaries is that God may have revealed the gospel story to remote tribes, long before any missionaries reached them
 - Don Richardson, recognized for his work among the stone-age Sawi peoples of Iran Jaya writes a fascinating story in *Eternity in Their Hearts ...*

Deep in the hill country of south central Ethiopia live several million coffee-growing people, who though divided into quite different tribes, share common belief in a benevolent being called Magano-omnipotent Creator of all that is. One of these tribes is called variously the Darassa or -more accurately - the Gedeo people. Few of the Gedeo tribe's half-million members actually prayed to Magano. In fact, a casual observer would have found the people far more concerned to appease an evil being they called Sheit'an. One day Albert Brant asked a group of Gedeo, "How is it that you regard Magano with profound awe, yet sacrifice to Sheit'an?" He received the following reply: "We sacrifice to Sheit'an, not because we love him, but because we simply do not enjoy close enough ties with Magano to allow us to be done with Sheit'an!"

At least one Gedeo man, however, did pursue a personal response from Magano. His name - Warrasa Wange. His status-related to the Gedeo tribe's "royal family." His domicile- Dilla, a town located on an extreme edge of Gedeo tribal land. His method of approach to Magano-a simple prayer asking Magano to reveal Himself to the Gedeo people!

Warrasa Wange got speedy response. Startling visions took his brain by storm. He saw two white-skinned strangers. Warrasa saw the two whites erect flimsy shelters for themselves under the shade of a large sycamore tree near Dilla, Warrasa's hometown. Later they built more permanent shiny-roofed structures. Eventually these structures dotted an entire hillside! Never had the dreamer seen anything even faintly resembling either the flimsy temporary structures or the shiny-roofed permanent ones. All dwellings in Gedeo land were grass-roofed.

Then Warrasa heard a voice. "These men," it said, "will bring you a message from Magano, the God you seek. Wait for them." In a final scene of his vision, Warrasa saw himself remove the center pole from his own house. In Gedeo symbolism, the center pole of a man's house stands for his very life. He then carried that center pole out of town and set it in the ground next to one of the shiny-roofed dwellings of the strange men. Warrasa understood the implication- his life must later stand in identification with those strange men, their message, and with Magano who would send them. Warrasa waited. Eight years passed. During those eight years several other soothsayers among the Gedeo people prophesied that strangers would soon arrive with a message from Magano.

Then, one very hot day in December 1948, blue-eyed Canadian Albert Brant and his colleague Glen Cain lurched over the horizon in a battered old International truck. Their mission- to begin missionary work for the glory of God among the Gedeo people. They had hoped to gain permission from Ethiopian officials to locate their new mission at the very center of the Gedeo region, but Ethiopians friendly to the mission advised that such a request would meet certain refusal due to the current political climate. “Ask only to go as far as this town called Dilla,” the advisors said with a wink. “It is quite distant from the center of the tribe. Those opposed to your mission will think you couldn’t possibly influence the entire tribe from such a peripheral town!” There it is,” Brant said to Cain. “It’s only the very edge of the Gedeo population, but it will have to do.” ... he turned the old International toward Dilla. Glen Cain wiped sweat from his brow. ... “Look at that old sycamore tree!” Albert responded. “Just what the doctor ordered!” ... In the distance, Warrasa Wange heard the sound. He turned just in time to see Brant’s old truck pull to a stop under the sycamore’s spreading branches. Slowly Warrasa headed toward the truck, wondering . . .

Three decades later Warrasa (now a radiant believer in Jesus Christ, Son of Magano), together with Albert Brant and others, counted more than 200 churches among the Gedeo people-churches averaging more than 200 members each! With the help of Warrasa and other inhabitants of Dilla, almost the entire Gedeo tribe has been influenced by the gospel-in spite of Dilla's peripheral location!

- Quirinius' great ability contrasts vividly with the inexperience of Qunitilius Varus, official governor of Syria from 7 or 6 B.C. to 4 B.C.
 - Varus lost 3 legions of men (about 15000 men) in a battle in the Teutoburger forest of Germany. Considered one of the most shocking disasters to Roman arms in the century.
 - Caesar Augustus may have had some misgivings about Varus after that episode

- A reasonable reconstruction might assume Varus came to Syria, an untried man. The census was due in Palestine in 8 or 7 B.C. and it could have been that Augustus ordered the man who had just successfully dealt with the problem of the Pisidian highlanders, to undertake the delicate task.
 - Herod I (“the Great”) had recently lost favor of the emperor and may have been thinking about how to perform the census, a process that always enraged the Jews. Quirinius’ intervention, the requisite organization and preparation could have delayed it to 5 B.C.

- Josephus confirms that the rebellion of A.D. 6 was a response to the enrollment (census) probably carried out rather heavy handedly.
- The earlier census seems to have appealed to the custom of the Jews, but the Romans had two problems:
 - Herod ruled Judea, not Quirinius
 - The people didn't like the Romans messing in their affairs.
 - From the standpoint of the Romans, the most diplomatic solution would be for Quirinius to negotiate a census carried out under the auspices of Herod and according to the Jewish practice of registration by tribes

- This seems a possibility since Roman's normally conducted censuses based on land ownership, not home towns.
 - They did make exceptions
 - Egyptian papyrus dated A.D. 104 indicates Egyptians were required to return their home city for the Roman census of Egypt
- Also, in A.D. 6 Palestine was no longer ruled by one King, but was split up into several tetrarchies. Therefore it would have been impossible for Mary and Joseph to have been required to travel from Bethlehem to Nazareth unless it was prior to the death of Herod the Great.

Quite a bit of evidence...

- According to Jewish archaeologist, Nelson Glueck “It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference”
- Millar Burrows of Yale (not a conservative Christian) “On the whole, there can be no question that results of excavation have increased the respect of scholars for the Bible as a collection of historical documents”

But we have only discovered a fraction of the evidence created ...

- Edwin Yamauchi cautions:
“Historians of antiquity, in using the archaeological evidence, have very often failed to realize how slight is the evidence at our disposal. It would not be exaggerating to point out that what we have is but one fraction of a second fraction of a third fraction of a fourth fraction of a fifth fraction of the possible evidence.”
- For this reason, it is imperative that both those supporting and denying the historical reliability of the gospel accounts not go beyond the evidence supplied by archaeology.

Geography

- Israel offers very unique landscape. It can be snowing in Jerusalem while only a few miles away it can be hot enough for sunbathing around the Dead Sea (at 1300 feet below sea level). North of the Sea of Galilee is the 9000 foot Mt. Hermon.
- But there also many obscure points of geography that likely only a native would know.

- *“¹³Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi ...¹⁸“I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. ”* Matthew 16:13, 18 (NASB)
- Caesarea Philippi is at the base of the 9000 foot “rock” of Mt. Hermon
- The “gates of Hades” was a rabbinic term referring to Gentile cities, referring to the one day when his mission would overpower the Gentile “gods”. Carved into base of Mt. Hermon were numerous large niches which housed statues of the Greco-Roman Gods.

- *“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’”* John 7:38 (NASB)
- The river Jordan forms from springs emanating from the base of Mt. Hermon
 - Some of these springs gush forth from the base of the mountain, up out of the ground and are more than 10 feet across!

- There are many other examples:
 - Hot Springs of Gadera around Sea of Galilee
 - Attracted many in need of healing... and this is where Jesus spent time healing

*“Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. ²⁴The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. ²⁵Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the **Decapolis** and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.”*
 - Gadera was the largest city of the **Decapolis** (NASB)
 - Southern Temple steps faced tombstones on Mt. Olive (where rabbi’s often addressed pupils)

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. ”

Summary

- Some skeptics say “How can you trust the gospel accounts?”
 - Implication is that without external corroboration, you can’t trust them
 - But remember, Josephus (and other writers) give quite a bit of information that agrees with the gospel accounts, but historians have found plenty of errors in his work as well as in that of other writer’s of antiquity. Who do trust as the bearer of facts?
 - And, as stated before, if the implication is that Christians “made this up”, then these same Christians were willing to die for what they knew to be a lie. Not a convincing argument.

- H.M. Orlinsky, in *Ancient Israel*, discusses development of a new attitude regarding the negative results of previous radical criticism

“More and more the older view that the biblical data were suspect and even likely to be false, unless corroborated by extrabiblical facts, is giving way to one which holds that, by and large, the biblical accounts are more likely to be true than false, unless clear-cut evidence from sources outside the Bible demonstrate the reverse.”

- Very little extrabiblical evidence exists to confirm this horrific story. Can it be true?
- What we do know is that Herod received the title of “King” during a trip to Rome in 40 B.C.
 - A coin issued in 40 B.C. shows a palm bowing under a Macedonian star atop his helmet signifying that no one would usurp his throne.
 - He also knew that the Messiah was expected in Rome according to the 4th Eclogue of Virgil
 - Herod, therefore married Mariamne to become a partaker of the blessings of the star of the Hasmoneans, which like the star of Macedonians, was the symbol for messianic rulers

- Herod sent his sons to Rome to study in the house of Pollio, the family to which the coming of the messiah had been prophesied by Virgil. Herod did everything to become recipient of the messianic prophecy he had heard. The Macedonian helmet and the Macedonian/Hasmonean star on his coin from the year 40 B.C. make it clear that his messianic aspirations go back to the very beginning of his career.
- Near the end of his life, Herod had 3 of his sons killed out of suspicion that they sought to overthrow his kingdom. He was a cold-blooded murderer of the worst sort.

The Temple Mount

- Covering an area of 25-30 football fields, the retaining walls rose to the height of 10 stories. The smallest stone blocks used in constructing the walls weighed 2-5 tons. The largest measured 40 feet in length, 13 feet in width and 10 feet in height and weighed 400 tons.
- This temple was a special place!

The Temple Mount

- *“When the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him, ²⁸crying out, “Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” ²⁹For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul **had brought him into the temple.**”*
- An inscription, written in Greek and Latin and found in Jerusalem in 1871 describing the barrier between the inner and outer courts, confirms the furor that would have occurred if a Gentile had cross this boundary:

“No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to thank for his ensuing death.”

Dead Sea Scrolls

- Discovered by Bedouin shepherds of the Ta'amirah tribe in caves near Qumran
- Prior to their discovery the oldest known OT manuscript was from the late 9th or early 10th century A.D.
- The Dead Sea Scrolls were as early as 3rd century B.C. (~1300 years older)
 - Nearly identical between DSS and 9th century Massoretic text
 - Scholars doubts regarding the accuracy of the Massoretic text were proven to be unfounded
 - Extraordinary agreement indicates the care in copying

OT and NT Agreement

- Have you ever wondered why, when an OT verse is quoted in the NT, it sometimes doesn't seem to match up exactly with its OT counterpart?
- After the destruction of the Jewish Temple in A.D. 70 a synod was convened at Jamnia, near Jaffa between A.D. 90 and 100.
 - Agreed to standardize various texts into one
 - Agreed which texts were considered authoritative

DSS predates Council of Jamnia

- The DSS confirms that there were other textual traditions widely circulated in the 1st century.
 - Think of today
 - KJV, RSV, NKJV, NIV, NLT, NASB, etc.
- The Septuagint (aka “LXX”, as in “70” for the ~70 Jewish elders who translated it in and around Alexandria Egypt during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus in the middle of the 3rd century B.C.) was a translation of the Hebrew OT into Greek.

- As a result, depending on which “version” of the OT was quoted by the NT author, you will have slightly different wording