

Evidence For The Historical Jesus

- Have you ever heard ...
 - “Who was Jesus anyway”?
 - “What was he really like”?
 - “Why are there so few references to Jesus outside Christian writings”?

Why is the historicity of Jesus Important?

- “Ask a devout Christian whether they believe that Christ died and rose again, and they will say *of course they do*. Ask them for evidence and they will be baffled by the question. It is not a matter of evidence, but of belief; asking for evidence indicates doubt, and with doubt there is no faith.”

John Gribbin, *In Search of the Double Helix: Quantum Physics and Life*

Facts do back up Christianity

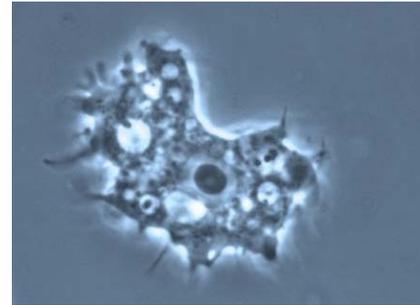
- “It cannot be stated too strongly that Christianity is an *historical religion*, and that it is so intimately tied to history that if the historical credibility of its sources were to be proven false, it would *at once collapse* as a possible claimant for our loyalty.”

Charles Anderson, *The Historical Jesus: A Continuing Quest*₄

- Goal of this study is to help answer the questions you have about the life Jesus lived as he walked among the people of the first century
- We believe God has given us enough evidence to allow a strong conviction based on overwhelming probability, although not so certain *as to force belief*

A Proud Cell Says It Knows Everything

- Consider the Amoeba
- It lives, eats and dies
- What can it know about things it can't see, touch, taste, feel or otherwise directly sense?
 - It wouldn't have any idea what a caterpillar could do.



A Proud Insect Says they Know All

- Consider the caterpillar



- What does it know about things it can't see, touch, taste, feel or otherwise directly sense?
 - The caterpillar would have no ability to know what a human could do (build a laser or computer or jet engine). This would be beyond fantastic.

A Proud Person Says they Know All

- Consider the person



- What can a man or woman know about things it can't see, touch, taste, feel or otherwise directly sense?
 - If you can't, does that mean God does not exist?
 - Remember the amoeba... 😊

Revelation from God

¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has **shown it** to them. ²⁰ 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...

Romans 1:19-20 (NKJV)

The Bible States that Faith is a *Gift*

⁴ There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. ⁶ And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. ⁷ But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: ⁸ for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ But one and the same Spirit works all these things, **distributing to each one individually as He wills.**

1 Corinthians 12:4-11 (NKJV)

Understanding is Limited without God

¹⁴ But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

1 Corinthians 2:14 (NKJV)

Christianity is a **historical religion**

- “He [God] so regulates the knowledge of Himself that He has given signs of Himself, visible to those who seek Him and not to those who seek Him not. There is enough obscurity for those who have a contrary disposition”

Blaise Pascal, French mathematician, physicist, inventor,
quoted from William Trotter's book *Paschal's Pensees*

The Debate over the Historical Jesus is a relatively recent phenomena

- 1778 : H. S. Reimarius, Professor of Hebrew and Oriental Language in Hamburg, Germany
 - Jesus was a Jewish zealot who failed to set up his messianic kingdom
 - His disciples stole his body and made up stories of the resurrection
 - Strong skepticism about regarding the gospels as historical sources

120 years later in Germany...

- 1901 : William Wrede, German New Testament scholar
 - Jesus could not actually have told his disciples and others to keep quiet about healings he performed and about his messiahship.

- ⁴⁰ A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.”
- ⁴¹ Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” ⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.
- ⁴³ Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: ⁴⁴ “See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.”

120 years later in Germany ...

- 1901 : William Wrede, German New Testament scholar
 - Jesus could not actually have told his disciples and others to keep quiet about healings he performed and about his messiahship.
 - Therefore, they must be false statements added by the gospel writer Mark
 - The gospels, then, were little more than theological fantasy

20 years after that (also Germany)...

- 1919 : K. L. Schmidt
 - Almost all details of time and place in the gospels were artificially constructed

Still in Germany in 1920s...

- Martin Dibelius (*Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur*¹)
- Rudolf Bultmann (*Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*²)
 - Created “Form Criticism”
 - Oral tradition suffered from additions, deletions and changes
 - Early church controlled the content
 - Gospel writers borrowed content from ancient writers
 - Rationalism says there can be no miracles
 - Not much of the gospels can be considered reliable historical narrative

¹ History of Early Christian Literature

² The History of the Synoptic Tradition

60 years later in the US

- 1982 : Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, Henry Lincoln
 - *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*
 - Mary Magdalene is the wife of Jesus. They had as many as 6 children
 - “In order to find [the evidence of this marriage] we would be obliged to read between the lines, fill in certain gaps, account for certain caesuras and ellipses. We would have to deal with omissions, with innuendos, with references that were, at best, oblique.”
 - How does “fill in certain gaps” differ from “making something up?”

2 years after that ...

- 1984 : Elizabeth Clare Prophet
 - *The Lost Years of Jesus*
 - Jesus spent 17 years (between age 13 and 30) in India
 - Presents the testimonies of 4 witnesses who have seen documents (age of these documents uncertain) which preserve this tradition in India.
 - Not well documented
 - Scholars will not take this book seriously

Who remembers the Da Vinci Code?

- 1982 Holy Blood, Holy Grail probably was the inspiration for Dan Brown’s 2003 novel, “The Da Vinci Code”
 - Even used Richard Leigh’s and Michael Baigent’s last names for the character Leigh Teabing (Baigent scrambled!) .
 - The “Priory of Sion” was a hoax created by a pretender to the throne of France, Pierre Plantard, a convicted con-man, in 1953.

The Unusual Nature of Extrabiblical References to Jesus

Non-Biblical Evidence

- Many people want to see non-biblical evidence for the many extraordinary things mentioned in the Bible
 - (e.g. the resurrection of Christ)
- What collateral proof is there of the historical fact of the life of Jesus Christ?

Pontius Pilate

- What reports have been preserved from Pilate regarding the trial, and execution of Jesus of Nazareth?
 - None
- But...
 - No official record has been preserved of *any* report from Pilate or *any* other Roman governor of Judea sent to Rome about *anything*

Did these reports exist at one time?

- Justin Martyr, writing in approximately 150 A.D, informs emperor Antoninus Pius of the fulfillment of Psalm 22:16
 - But the words “They pierced my hands and feet,” refer to the nails which were fixed in Jesus’ hands and feet on the cross; and after he was crucified, his executioners cast lots for his garments, and divided them among themselves. That these things happened you may learn from the “Acts” which were recorded under Pontius Pilate.

- Justin continues;

- That he performed these miracles you may easily satisfy yourself from the “Acts” of Pontius Pilate.

Justin Martyr, *First Apology*

- Justin and Tertullian (another Christian apologist of a generation or two later)

- ... were sure that the census which was held about the time of Jesus’ birth was recorded in the official archives of the reign of Augustus and that anyone who took the trouble to look these archive up would find the registration of Joseph and Mary there.

Bruce, F.F., *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, 1974c

- Bold statements, if in fact, no such records existed.
- Justin is writing to the equivalent of the President
- Does it seem likely he would make claims based on documents both knew didn't exist?

- It did bother 4th century Christians that these records did not exist by that time
 - An obviously forged “*Acts of Pilate*” was manufactured at that time.
 - Evidence: addressed to Claudius (served AD 41-54) even though Tiberius was emperor (served AD 14-37) when Pilate governed Judea (AD 26-37).

Then, how big a stir did Jesus make?

- Gospels speak of “multitudes” or “crowds” following Jesus (Greek *ochloi* used 175 separate times)

*“Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion on the **crowd** (ochlon | ὄχλον) because they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint from exhaustion on the way.”*

Feeding of the 4000, Matt 15:32 (NKVJ)

- Even Herod (Luke 23:8) wanted to meet him, so he was known

However, there was plenty to keep the Romans occupied

- Unarmed peasant preacher versus Arbel and Gamala?
 - 35 years after Jesus' crucifixion, 5000 Zealot terrorists in Gamala would jump to their deaths from their mountain fortress rather than submit to Roman rule
- Rome did not view the disciples as a military threat (they weren't crucified with Jesus)
- "They simply had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a certain dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive"

... and also...

- More conflicts are recorded in the gospels between Jesus and the Pharisees than between Jesus and any other group of people.
- 1st century Christianity appears to be predominantly a lower-class movement
 - Only limited appeal to the influential classes

Also...

- The issue of historicity of Jesus arose only in the last few hundred years
 - During the first several centuries after Jesus' death there was no indication that his historical existence was in question
 - Interestingly even today, no scholar doubts the existence of the Christian church in the 1st century.

Then...

- What kind of reference to Jesus by a non-Christian would need to exist in order to incontrovertibly prove his existence?
 - First hand witnesses
 - But, looking at the available literature, none has survived that would be expected to refer to him from a point of a direct eyewitness

As a result...

- We must seek non-Christian evidence for the life of Jesus by the same method applied to every other person of antiquity who was considered insignificant by the authorities of the day.
 - That method:
analyze the credibility of secondhand reports

What kind of reports are available?

- “While some believe that we know almost nothing about Jesus from ancient, non-New Testament sources, this plainly is not the case. Not only are there many such sources, but Jesus is one of the persons of ancient history concerning whom we have a significant amount of quality data. His is one of the most-mentioned and most-substantiated lives in ancient times.”

Habermas, Gary R., *Ancient Evidence for the Life of Jesus*. Thomas Nelson, 1984

We will see many references...

- But why are so many extra-biblical references to Jesus negative in tone?
 - Are there firsthand accounts of Christ's life which were positive yet not put into the Bible?
 - If someone had seen the miracles, it would seem likely they would be amazed and tell others. These stories, then, may have found their way into the Bible as they supported the message the Christians wanted to tell.
 - It would be more likely that remaining stories would be negative
 - But, as we have seen, it is unusual that there are *any* extrabiblical references to Jesus

Schedule

Class	Date	Title
1	8-Apr-15	Who was this Jesus ? / The Unusual Nature of Extrabiblical References to Jesus
2	15-Apr-15	References to Jesus by Ancient Secular Writers, Rabbis, Post-Apostolic Writers
3	22-Apr-15	Are Biblical References Reliable? / Jewish Oral Traditions
4	29-Apr-15	History and Mythology, Evidence from Historical Geography and Archaeology
5	6-May-15	Jewish-ness of Jesus
6	13-May-15	Miracles / Reliability of Resurrection Reports / Messiah / Son of God