

The Real Jesus
Xenos Summer Institute 2013 – Jenny Hale
Part 1 – Jesus: Myth or Reality

Overview

Part 1: Jesus: Myth or Reality?

- Jesus and his place in history
- Jesus outside of the bible: Gentile and Jewish writings
- Are the biblical biographies of Jesus trustworthy?

Part 2: Did Jesus Really do Miracles?

- With all the copies and translations how could we know what was first written?
- Did Jesus really perform miracles?
- Why did Jesus perform miracles?
- A reflection on the supernatural universe

Jesus and his place in history

1.

2.

“I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between Him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creation of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded his empire upon love; and at this hour millions would die for Him.” – Napoleon¹

3.

“Jesus never wrote a book, but the Library of Congress holds more books about Jesus (seventeen thousand) than about any other historical figure, roughly twice as many as Shakespeare, the runner-up.”²

“I am a historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history.” – H. G. Wells³

¹ Quoted in Mark Driscoll, Gerry Breshears, *Vintage Jesus* (2007), p. 202.

² Quoted in Driscoll & Breshears, *Vintage Jesus*, p. 211

³ Quoted in Driscoll & Breshears, *Vintage Jesus*, p. 211.

Did Jesus Really Exist?

Jesus outside of the bible: Gentile writings around the time of Christ

1. Mara Bar-Serapion, (Syrian prisoner writing to his son after 73AD) lists Jesus among other historical figures⁴

- Jesus, wise king of the Jews, is listed with other historical figures like Socrates and Pythagoras

2. Pliny the Younger, Roman Senator, acknowledged Jesus Christ's existence (110 AD)⁵

- "I decided to dismiss any who denied that they are or ever have been Christians when they repeated after me a formula invoking the gods and made offerings of wine and incense to your image. . .and when they reviled Christ . . . I understand that no one who is really a Christian can be made to do these things. . They also maintained that the sum total of their guilt or error was no more than the following. They had met regularly before dawn on a determined day, and sung antiphonally a hymn to Christ as if to a god"

3. Tacitus, greatest Roman historian, mentioned Christ in his *Annals* (116AD)⁶

- "Therefore, to put down the rumor, Nero substituted as culprits and punished in the most unusual ways those hated for their shameful acts, whom the crowd called "Chrestians". The founder of this name, Christ, had been executed in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate."

4. Suetonius, Roman lawyer, wrote *Lives of the Caesars*, also acknowledged his existence (120AD)⁷

- "He [Claudius] expelled the Jews from Rome, since they were always making disturbances because of the instigator Chrestus."

⁴ Bruce, p.117-118

⁵ Van Voorst, p. 25

⁶ Van Voorst, p. 41

⁷ Van Voorst, p. 41

5. Lucian of Samosata, Greek satirist, mocks Christ in *The Death of Peregrinus* (165AD)⁸

- “He was second only to the one whom they still worship today, the man in Palestine who was crucified because he brought this new form of initiation into the world. . moreover, that first lawgiver of theirs persuaded them that they are all brothers the moment they transgress and deny the Greek gods and begin worshipping that crucified sophist and living by his laws. . .if a fraudulent and cunning person who knows how to take advantage of a situation comes among them, he can make himself rich in a short time while laughing at these foolish people.”

Why aren't there more early Roman references to Jesus?

- “From the standpoint of imperial Rome, Christianity in the first hundred years of its existence was an obscure, disreputable, vulgar oriental superstition and if it found its way into the official records at all, these would most likely be the police records which, in common with many other first-century documents that we should like to see, have disappeared”⁹
- “The first century writings of Roman historians have almost completely perished.”¹⁰

Jesus outside of the bible: Jewish writings from around the time of Christ (Josephus and the rabbis)

Jewish writings correlate well with the biblical accounts:

- Jesus was the firstborn son of Mary
- He had followers
- He taught and worked miracles
- He claimed to be Messiah
- He was tried and executed by Romans and/or Jews
- His followers claimed he rose from the dead
- The Christian movement continued after his death
- His brother James lead the Jerusalem church

⁸ Van Voorst, p. 59-61

⁹ Bruce, F. F., *The New Testament Documents, Are They Reliable?* (1981) p.118

¹⁰ Van Voorst, p. 70

The rabbinic writings however, take a negative view of Jesus:

- “All Jewish sources treated Jesus as a fully historical person. Like the classical opponents of Christianity, the rabbis. . . used the real events of Jesus’ life against him. They believed that Jesus had an unusual conception (the product of some sin), worked amazing deeds (by evil magic), taught his disciples and the Jewish people (heresy), was executed (justly, for his own sins), and was proclaimed by his disciples as risen from the dead (conspiratorially).”¹¹

In summary:

“Some writers may toy with the fancy of a ‘Christ-myth’, but they do not do so on the ground of historical evidence. The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar. It is not historians who propagate the ‘Christ-myth’ theories” ¹² F.F. Bruce, Professor of Biblical Criticism, University of Manchester, England

Are the biblical biographies of Jesus trustworthy? (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)

“More than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John among them.” ¹³

What about the other “gospels”?
(*The gospels of Peter, Thomas, Mary, Judas, The Secret Gospel of Mark*)

How do we know that we have the correct biographies in our bible?

Two tests for reliable biographies

1. Is this an eyewitness account?
 - Was it written in a time close to Jesus’ lifetime?
 - Is it historically and culturally accurate?
 - Does it record unflattering detail?
 - Does it have a bias?

¹¹ Van Voorst, p. 134

¹² Bruce, p. 123

¹³ Brown, Dan, *The DaVinci Code* (2003) pp. 230-250

2. Is the content credible?

- Contrast the content of the biblical gospels with that of the fake gospels (also known as pseudoepigrapha or “imposter writings”)

Pseudoepigrapha or “imposter writings”

1. They fail the eye-witness test:

- Not written close to Jesus’ lifetime
- Not historically or accurate
- Gnostic bias

2. They also fail the test for credible content:

- Example: The Gospel of Peter
- Example: The Gospel of Thomas (175 – 200 AD)

“These are the secret words that the living Jesus spoke and Didymus Judas Thomas wrote them down, and he said: “Whosoever finds the interpretation of these words shall not taste death.”

Saying 114 “Simon Peter said to them, ‘Let Mary leave us, because women are not worthy of life.’ Jesus said ‘Look, I shall guide her so that I will make her male, in order that she also may become a living spirit, being like you males, for every woman who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of Heaven”

Saying 7 “Blessings on the lion if a human eats it, making the lion human. Foul is the human if a lion eats it, making the lion human.

Conclusion:

Part 2:

- The bible has been copied and translated so many times, how could we ever know what was originally written?
- Did Jesus really do miracles?
- Why did he do miracles?
- The supernatural universe

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Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*