

WHY THINK THIS IS WORTH A LOOK?

Do You Have to Commit Intellectual Suicide to Genuinely Believe?

*Jesus existed - Pliny, Tacitus, Josephus
James and Ananus - Josephus
Wonder worker - Josephus, Celsus
Wise man, Teacher - Josephus
Followers regarded as Divine - Pliny
Crucified - Tacitus, Lucian, Josephus
Pontius Pilate/Tiberius - Tacitus, Josephus
Darkness of Crucifixion story - Thallus
Catalyst for Growth - Tacitus
Claudius in 49 A.D. - Suetonius
Nero in 60's A.D. - Tacitus
Governor of Bithynia in 100 A.D. - Pliny

G. K. Chesterton—The teachings of Jesus have not been tried and found wanting; they have been found difficult and left untried.

William Temple— If our concept of God is wrong, the more religious we get, the more dangerous we are to ourselves and others.

Undisputable Facts:

1.) In the first third of the 1st Century (30,40,50 A.D.) there is a band of Jewish folks who went out into the world proclaiming a message. (A lot of different sources.*)

That Jesus Christ, who was a contemporary of theirs,
Lived an extraordinary life
Did miracles
Made outrageous claims (especially in a Jewish environment) that he had come down from heaven and that he was the son of God.
Most importantly they claimed that he rose from the dead.
He was the Savior of the World.

2.) They went out into a hostile environment, starting in Palestine and then very quickly spread throughout the Roman empire.

3.) They suffered a lot of persecution because of it.

We know from Tacitus, a Roman Historian, that Christianity had grown so large and so fast that by the years 62,63, 64 AD, that the Roman Emperor Nero could plausibly blame the burning of Rome on these Christians. And that justified trying to exterminate them on his campaign to try and kill all the Christians. (And it was as brutal as anything in history affords us.) Even the hardened Tacitus comments that Nero's treatment of the Christians was barbaric even according to Roman standards.

4.) We find the basic message of the early followers of this Jesus in the Gospels and Paul's Epistles (the earliest writings).

The Lie Theory

Question 1: Why would these men do this?

No Motive.
Heretical by traditional Jewish Standards
Publius (or Gaius) Cornelius Tacitus (AD 56 - AD 117)

Question 2: Could they have pulled this lie off?

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."— John 10.10

*All texts quoted from the TNIV unless otherwise noted.

Easily Falsified

Not long, long ago, in a place far, far away.

Jesus was a fellow Jew whom they knew and they presumed their audience knew. (James Jesus' brother)

Lived in Palestine where they were preaching.

Died very recently

Big names are used (Pilate the Governor, Caiaphas the High Priest, Joseph of Arimathea)

No evidence that they were the kind of people who would lie.

Christianity was seen as a pernicious cult that needed to be stamped out and although there are many charges against Christianity in the first Century, never is the charge made that they made it all up! (They don't deny that Jesus did miracles.) We can't find any ancient person who accuses the early Christians of making the whole thing up!

Question 3. Why are there no deserters?

“Watergate involved a conspiracy to cover up, perpetuated by the closest aides to the President of the United States—the most powerful men in America, who were intensely loyal to their president. But one of them, John Dean, turned state's evidence, that is, testified against Nixon, as he put it, “to save his own skin”—and he did so only two weeks after informing the president about what was really going on—two weeks! The real cover-up, the lie, could only be held together for two weeks, and then everybody else jumped ship in order to save themselves. Now, the fact is that all that those around the President were facing was embarrassment, maybe prison. Nobody's life was at stake.”—Chuck Colson

Questions 4: Why do the Gospels read the way they do in regards to their counter cultural dimensions?

One example is Jesus' treatment of women.

OF LEGENDS AND LORE

Probabilistic Conclusions Based on Evidence Or Presuppositions of the Naturalistic Worldview

The Legendary Theory:

Question 1: How do orthodox monotheistic Jewish men go against their most fundamental convictions within their own culture and begin to worship a contemporary Jewish person as the embodiment of Yahweh?

Most antithetical act to Jewish Culture is the belief that a human being can be God.

John 19.7—The Jews insisted, “We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.”

Question 2: How could you go from an ordinary carpenter, in fundamental Judaism, to the revelation and embodiment of Yahweh Himself on earth *over night*?

Huge Problem: You don't have enough time.

(Alexandar the Great - 4 centuries later.)

(Buddah - 5 centuries later)

1Corinthians 15.1-8—Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Mark 15.21—A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.

Paul's first epistles were written in 49 A.D. - 16 years after Jesus. (Passing on traditional creedal material that Jesus is thoroughly Divine. It is arguable that Paul received this within 3-4 years of the event, at most 5 or 6. See Galatians 1,2.)

Dating of Luke:

Evidence from Book of Acts:

Ends abruptly with Paul being on house arrest (62 A.D.)

Does not mention the martyrdom of Paul which happened in 64 or 65 A.D.

Doesn't mention the Jewish-Roman War that broke out in 66 A.D.

Doesn't mention the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Doesn't mention the persecution under Nero (64 A.D.) .

Before 62 A.D. (Less than three decades after the original Jesus lived.)

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”— John 10.10

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Wolfgang Schadewaldt, one of the great Homeric scholars of this century, assessment of the historical reliability of the Gospels to Tubingen University Seminary in Germany—
“As someone who has acquired some knowledge of ‘literature’, I am particularly concerned here to note that when we read the Synoptic Gospels we cannot be other than captivated by the experiential vividness with which we are confronted. The conditions of their time stand before us: nature, the landscape of Palestine, the Sea of Galilee, places from the coast to the far side of the Jordan, and Nazareth with its sheer cliff. If only we read the text simply enough, we can imagine Jesus traveling here and there—a situation which we misunderstand if we miss the repeated ‘other way’—the most important words are spoken and actions performed ‘on the way’ as no more than literary decoration...I know of no other area of history-writing, biography or poetry where I encounter so great a wealth of material in such a small space.”
(W.Schadewaldt in M. Hengel, “Studies in the Gospel of Mark”, p.102)

Question 3: Where is the cultural catalyst for this legend?

Legends are born when cultures need strengthened.

The elements of the Jesus story are completely and entirely anti Jewish cultural needs for a story about a Messiah.

Question 4: How does one reconcile the claim that this story is a legend with the claim of these men that they are giving eyewitness testimony?

Legend: a nonhistorical or unverifiable story handed down by tradition from earlier times and popularly accepted as historical.

Claim of Disciples:

1John 1.1-5

... which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched . . . we have seen it . . . has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard . . . This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you . . .

Standard Rule of Historical Methodology:

“When you’re dealing with an ancient document that claims to write history and reads like history, treat it like history. If a historian thinks that an ancient document that claims to write history and reads like history is not reporting history, then the burden of proof lies with the historian to prove it wrong, it is not on the document to prove itself right.”

Natural Laws are description of what we find most often in nature they are not prescription of what we MUST find in nature. The Absolute Rejection of the Miraculous cannot be based on evidence or reason, because we do not have the exhaustive evidence for it to be. Rather it is a conclusion that is based on the presupposition of the Naturalistic world view and therefore a biased belief.

To the extent that one’s research and findings are based in a prior dogmatic assumption, such research cannot be considered critical or scientific research. — R.G. Collingwood (The Idea of History, p. 139)

An Open-Minded Scholarly Approach would be that if all available naturalistic explanations become implausible, we should consider explanations that go beyond our known natural laws.

THE RESURRECTION

When Tested By Historical Standards

Earliest Account - 53-55 A.D:

Five accounts in the first 20 to 60 years & 11 accounts within the first Century. Very rare in history that you have that many sources for a single event.

Ancient Judaism - Josephus (90 years later)
Alexander the Great - Arrian (400 years later)
Ancient Persian Wars - Herodotus (70 years later)
Middle Ages - St Bede (200 years later)

By Historical Standards the Resurrection is very exceptional.

Hallucination?

1. Too Many People
2. No Expectation
3. Would have called it a Vision
4. Only could conceive of a physical bodily resurrection
5. An Empty Tomb

If ever you have reason to believe anything in history actually happened you have every reason to believe this account is true.

1Corinthians 15.1-8

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John 20.1-8

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.

Four Qualities Scholars Look For:

1. Different Accounts
2. Irrelevant Detail (see Mark 10:23)
3. Counterproductive Detail
4. Historically Significant Detail

Archeology:

Census in Luke
Nazareth

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."— John 10.10

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John 14.6—Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”

The picture we get of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is of an itinerant, going around gathering those who will join him in a revolutionary way of doing life that he calls “the kingdom of God.” The “kingdom of God” is not some place out in the heavens, nor is it a place some go to when they die. This “kingdom of God” is a radical rearrangement of how we see God, ourselves and everyone else that leads to a radical rearrangement of how we do life in the here and now. It’s a radical rearrangement of how human beings arrange their society that is “of God” or “from” God . . . to us . . . through this person Jesus. To enter THIS is entirely revolutionary. It is a radical break with life as we have known it, as it has been given to us, as we have been told, as we have been instructed is the natural way of life. It is a call to go against how we have been indoctrinated, to go against the scripts we have been handed, the rules we have been given on how to play the game. (Personal rights, tit for tat, etc.) To “follow Jesus” is to break with all of that, and say, “I want to live by an entirely different evaluation of what is important.” It’s radical. It’s revolutionary.

Today, Jesus is still extending the ongoing invitation to join his revolution. He is looking for those who are weak but daring, afraid but believing, unsure but willing to take a risk, people who are simply crazy enough to go for it with him. To follow Jesus and live the Jesus way is the most revolutionary thing a human being can do. It’s not about a ticket to go to heaven. (How boring, tame, and domesticated!) It’s not about saying a simple prayer, going to church once a week and then simply going back to the way things have always been done. To follow Jesus IS radical and revolutionary. It is to adopt a completely counter intuitive way of doing life called The Way, of which Jesus is the template. The “kingdom of God,” rightly understood, is an alternate society formed around Jesus and his teachings. It’s about learning to follow the Jesus practice of love, forgiveness, restorative justice, mercy, and fidelity to self-sacrificial other-centeredness.

We are too skilled at taming revolutions and making them conventional. Too skilled at turning things like the sermon on the mount into a blasé blessing of the conventional life we’ve always known.

The Seeds of revolution will always be present as long as the Jesus story is always around, and you just never know when someone might leap.

Story Details vs Teachings