

The Intersection of History and Scripture





The Merneptah Stele

Poetic eulogy to pharaoh Merneptah, who ruled Egypt after Rameses the Great, ca. 1212-1202 BC

One line mentions Israel: "Israel is laid waste, its seed is not." Here we have the earliest mention of Israel outside the Bible and the only mention of Israel in Egyptian records.

Discovered in 1896 in Merneptah's mortuary temple in Thebes by Flinders Petrie



The Moabite Stone

- “The most extensive inscription ever recovered from ancient Palestine.”
- Discovered in Dhiban, Jordan, in 1868 by F. A. Klein.
- Stone slab, or stela, 3 ft high and 2 ft wide
- 2 Kings 3 and stone describe the same event from different perspectives.

Specifically mentions Israel and the Omri dynasty

Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III

- Found at Nimrud by A. H. Layard
- 6.5' tall, black limestone pillar
- Shalmaneser III died 823 B. C.
- King of Assyria
- Describes conquests and tributes from the conquered



Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III



Tribute of Jehu, son of Omri

The Taylor Prism



- Records the victories of the Assyrian king Sennacherib
- See ANET: “like a bird in a cage”
- 2 Kings 19:35-37
- See relief of Sennacherib taking Lachish

The Cyrus Cylinder





The Cyrus Cylinder

“... I am Cyrus. King of the world. When I entered Babylon... I did not allow anyone to terrorize the land... I kept in view the needs of people and all its sanctuaries to promote their well-being... I put an end to their misfortune. The Great God has delivered all the lands into my hand; the lands that I have made to dwell in a peaceful habitation...”

Tel Dan Inscription

- Found at Mt. Hermon
- From 9th century B. C.
- Found in 1993
- Says, “House of David”
- Says David was “King of Israel”
- First mention of King David found outside Bible



Shishak Inscription

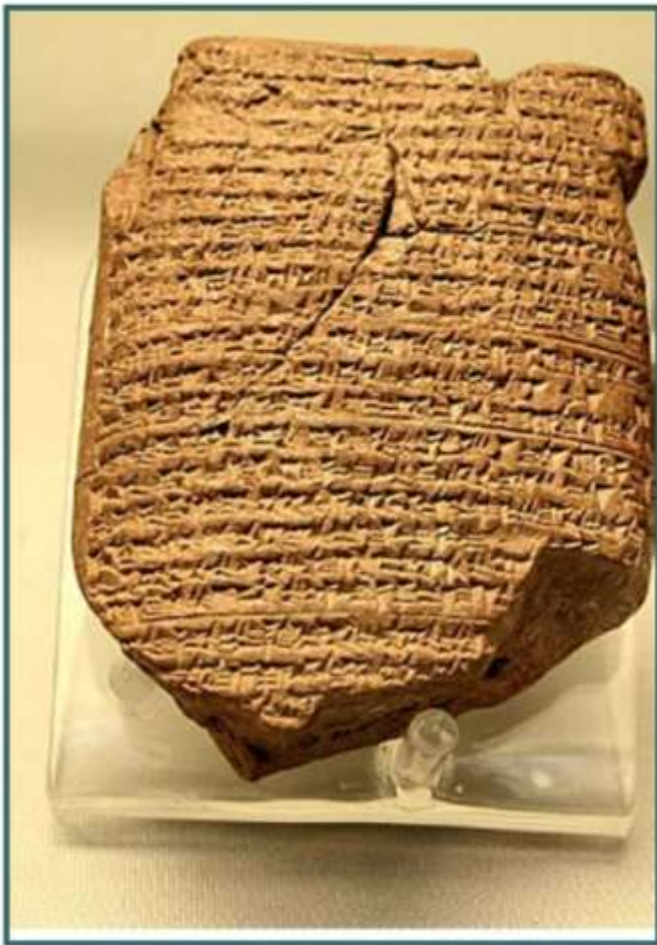
A relief of Sheshonk's (probably aka Shishak) expedition into Palestine. Lists 138 conquered towns in Palestine, incl. Megiddo. Attacked both Judah and Israel. Lists mostly towns in Israel.

“And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem; and he took away the treasures of the house of Jehovah, and the treasures of the king's house; he even took away all: and he took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made.”

1 Kings 14:25-26



Bas relief on the wall of the Temple of Amon, at Karnak.



Nebuchadnezzar's Chronicle

The tablet recounts Babylon's defeat of the Egyptian army at Carchemish in 605 B.C. and its conquest of Syria; Nebuchadnezzar's succession to the Babylonian throne that same year and his acceptance of tribute from the kings of Syro-Palestine in 604 B.C.; the sack of Ashkelon in 603 B.C.; and the hitherto-unknown battle in 601 B.C. between the Babylonians and the Egyptians and which ultimately caused Jehoiakim, king of Judah, to align himself with Egypt.

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon "...encamped against the city of Judah and on the second day of the month Addaru he seized the city and captured the king. He appointed there a king of his heart, received its heavy tribute and sent (it) to Babylon." (compare with 2 Kings 24:12-17)

**A wall relief from the
palace at Khorsabad.
Sargon II: King of
Assyria
(reigned 721–705 BC)
Compare with Isaiah
20:1**

*"Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger
And the staff in whose hand is My
indignation. Isaiah 10:5*

**"At the end of the 8th century BC,
Sargon II, king of Assyria, built a
vast palace of over ten hectares
in his new capital, Dur-Sharrukîn
(now Khorsabad). Part of the
rooms and courtyards were
covered with a rich sculpted
decoration." - The Louvre Museum**





Making
bricks in
ancient
Egypt

- From the tomb of Rekhmire, governor of Thebes and vizier during the reigns of Tuthmose III (1504-1450 B.C.) and Amenophis II (1450-1425 B.C.)

The Pilate Inscription

- **Discovered in 1961 in Caesarea Maritima**
- **Clearly identifies Pilate as praefect (governor) of Judea**
- **Disproves skeptics' claims**



A Closer Look



- The inscription is in a block of limestone 82 x 68 x 20 cm.
- *....]TIBERIEUM
[PON]TIUS PILATUS
[PRAEF]ECTUSIUD...E*
- Appears to be about a temple that Pilate built at Caesarea in honor of Emperor Tiberius (called a Tiberieum)

- He did not exist.
- He was an Essene.
- He was a traveling guru.
- He was a wise philosopher.
- He was a con man.
- He was a self-crowned Messiah.



Popular Portrayals of Jesus as Historical

"No official record has been preserved of any report which Pontius Pilate, or any other Roman governor of Judea, sent to Rome about anything. And only rarely has an official report from any governor of any Roman province survived. They may have sent in their reports regularly, but for the most part these reports were ephemeral documents, and in due course they disappeared."

– F.F. Bruce in *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the N.T.*



Where is all the Documentation?

“Historians would be glad to have authentic, multiple, congruent evidence on more personalities and events of ancient history.”

– William Blaiklock



Where is all the Documentation?

Blaiklock sought to catalog all the non-Christian writings in the Roman Empire, other than Philo, which survived the 1st Century but did not mention Jesus.

- 30's AD: Velleius Paterculus (retired army officer who published a *History of Rome*)
- 40's: Phaedrus (fables of Phaedrus, a Macedonian freedman)



Where is all the Documentation?

- 50's & 60's: Seneca (philosophical writings and letters), Columella (book on agriculture), Gaius Petronius (novel), Persius (satire), Elder Pliny (collection of odd facts about nature), Asconius Pedianus (commentary on Cicero), Quintus Curtius (history of Alexander the Great - only enough to fill 1' space)



Where is all the Documentation?

- 70's & 80's: Tacitus (minor work on Oratory - did mention Jesus and the Christians in another work), Marial (poems)
- 90's: Statius (poetry), Quintilian (books on oratory), Tacitus (one biography, one book of commentary on present day Germany) Juvenal (satire), Qumran (Dead Sea area)



Where is all the Documentation?

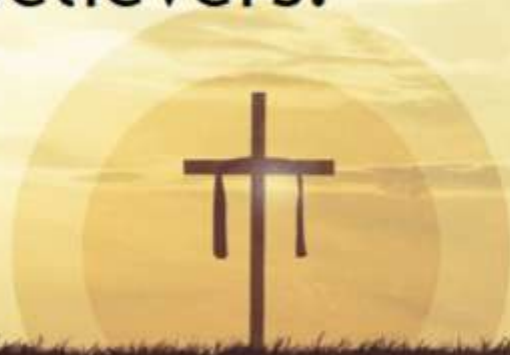
“Today Christianity has been so important for so long that one is apt to assume that it must have appeared important to educated pagans who lived AD 50-150.”

– G.A. Wells (unbeliever) in *Did Jesus Exist?*



Where is all the Documentation?

- Do we expect 1st Century issues to be the same as 21st Century issues?
- Do we expect them to chronicle their lives in the same way we chronicle ours?
- Do we expect 1st Century customs to be the same?
- Do we expect disinterested and unbelieving parties to say as much about an event as believers?



What Are Our Expectations?

- History cannot attain certainty in every area.
- People existed about whom we know nothing.
- How much must be said about someone in order for them to be considered historical?



Historical Expectations

- Remember, the New Testament is a collection of ancient documents.
- The documents of the New Testament are the earliest sources, closest to Jesus and the apostles, as opposed to secondary sources. They should be given the same consideration as any other ancient source.
- Radical reconstructions of Jesus today are usually based on apocryphal gospels, written under the names of apostles in the 2nd or 3rd Century.



Scriptural Evidence

1. They begin by trumpeting the author's scholarly credentials and serious research.
2. They claim or a new (or even suppressed) interpretation of Jesus.
3. They point to sources outside the Bible to enable us to read the gospels in a new way that is at odds with their face value meaning.
4. The new interpretation is provocative.
5. Traditional Christian beliefs, therefore, must be revised.

- Luke Timothy Johnson



Books about the “Real Jesus”

- There was insufficient time for legendary influences to erase the core facts.
- They are not analogous to “folk tales” or individual legends.
- The Jewish transmission of sacred traditions was highly developed and reliable.
- There were significant restraints on the embellishment of traditions about Jesus (eyewitnesses, apostles, etc.).
- They have a proven track record of historical reliability.



Reliability of the Gospels by William Lane Craig

- Scriptural evidence cannot be discounted, especially since there are books of scripture whose dates have been agreed upon by scholars.
- For example, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 is seen by scholars across the theological spectrum as containing an early Christian creed. For example, the terms “delivered” and “received” are technical in passing it on.
- Scholars also agree that 1 Corinthians was written in the 50’s, and this creed pre-dated that writing, which means it existed from an early date.



Scriptural Evidence

1 Corinthians 15:1-3

1 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,

1 Corinthians 15:4-8

4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

- Scholars all across the theological spectrum, as well as historians, agree that Paul wrote Galatians.
- In Galatians 1:19, Paul makes the off-hand remark that Jesus had a brother named James: “But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord’s brother.” (Galatians 1:19)
- Bart Ehrman (not a proponent of Christianity) has pointed to the value of a casual remark like this, positing that it affirms that Jesus existed.



Scriptural Evidence

- Christians believed that Jesus was really born in human flesh (Phil. 2:6, 1 Tim. 3:16, 1 Jn 4:2).
- Christians believed Jesus was of the lineage of David (Rom. 1:3-4, 2 Tim. 2:8).
- There is an implication of Jesus' baptism (Rom. 10:9).
- Christians believed that Jesus' word was preached, which resulted in person's believing in Him (1 Timothy 3:16).



Scriptural Evidence from Early Time

- Some might assume that a believer cannot tell the truth because of a bias.
- The assumption is that an unbeliever is more objective and less biased.
- Another assumption is that an unbeliever could admit Jesus is who he said he was, yet not accept those claims.
- What kind of testimony are we looking for?



Demand for Unbeliever's Testimony

“It is interesting to study the earliest references to him in non-Christian literature, but these are few and unimportant, and need not engage our attention here.”

– F.F. Bruce



Demand for Unbeliever's Testimony

- Flew was impressed by Jesus and the evidence surrounding him.
- “There’s absolutely no good reason for believing in Islam, whereas in Christianity you have the charismatic figure of Jesus, the defining example of what is meant by charismatic.”
- “The evidence for the Resurrection is better than for claimed miracles in any other religion.”
- Flew “dismissed views that Jesus never existed as ‘ridiculous.’”



***Christianity Today* Interview with Antony Flew**

“Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun – unreasonably, as it seems to me (unreasonably, of course, because a solar eclipse could not take place at the time of the full moon, and it was at the season of the Paschal full moon that Christ died).”

– **Julius Africanus, quoting a statement recorded by Thallus in A.D.**

52.

“Hence to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also.”

– **Tacitus *Annals* XV, 44**

“Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind... Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.”

– **Tacitus *Annals* XV, 44**

“And with regard to the eclipse in the time of Tiberius Caesar, in whose reign Jesus appears to have been crucified, and the great earthquakes which then took place, Phlegon too, I think, has written in the thirteenth or fourteenth book of his Chronicles.”

“Now Phlegon, in the the thirteenth or fourteenth book, I think, of his Chronicles, not only ascribed to Jesus a knowledge of future events (although falling into confusion about some things which refer to Peter, as if they referred to Jesus),”

– Phlegon, A.D. 140 (Quoted by Origen)

“but also testified that the result corresponded to His predictions. So that he also, by these very admissions regarding foreknowledge, as if against his will, expressed his opinion that the doctrines taught by the father of our system were not devoid of divine power.

Regarding these we have in the preceding pages made our defense, according to our ability, adducing the testimony of Phlegon, who relates that these events took place at the time when our Savior suffered.”

– Phlegon, A.D. 140 (Quoted by Origen)

“About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he ... wrought surprising feats.... He was the Christ. When Pilate ...condemned him to be crucified, those who had . . . come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared ... restored to life.... And the tribe of Christians ... has ... not disappeared.”

– **Josephus *Antiquities* 18.63-64**

“Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned...”

– **Josephus *Antiquities* 20**

“At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive; accordingly, he was perhaps the messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.”

– **Arabic Retake on the Testimonium**

“They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food – but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.”

– **Pliny the Younger *Epistles* X 96**

“I do not wish, therefore, that the matter should be passed by without examination, so that these men may neither be harassed, nor opportunity of malicious proceedings be offered to informers. If, therefore, the provincials can clearly evince their charges against the Christians, so as to answer before the tribunal, let them pursue this course only, but not by mere petitions, and mere outcries against the Christians. For it is far more proper, if any one would bring an accusation, that you should examine it.” – **Emperor Hadrian (reigned 117-138), quoted in Eusebius, *History of the Church* 4.9**

“As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, (another way to spell Christus), he expelled them from Rome.”

– **Suetonius, *Life of Claudius* 25.4**

“Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a body of people addicted to a novel and mischievous superstition.”

- **Suetonius, *Life of Nero***

“The Christians ... worship a man to this day – the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account.... [It] was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws.”

– **Lucian of Samosata, *The Death of Peregrine*, 11-13**

“What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as a judgment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King? It was just after that their kingdom was abolished.”

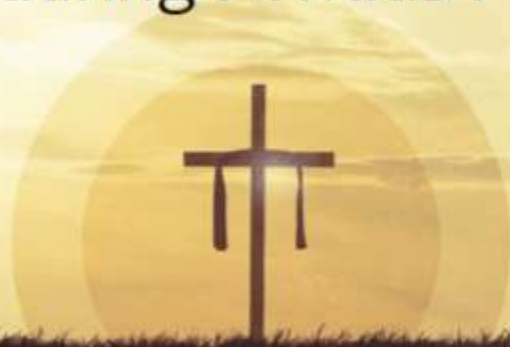
**– Mara Bar-Serapion
(A.D. 70 or as late as 200’s)**

“God justly avenged these three wise men: the Athenians died of hunger; the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea; the Jews, ruined and driven from their land, live in complete dispersion. But Socrates did not die for good; he lived on in the teaching of Plato. Pythagoras did not die for good; he lived on in the statue of Hera. Nor did the wise King die for good; he lived on in the teaching which he had given.”

**– Mara Bar-Serapion
(A.D. 70 or as late as 200’s)**

- He wrote *The True Word*, a polemic against Christianity.
- Origen (185-254) responded to this work in his own *Contra Celsum* in AD 248.
- Some have claimed that the facts of Jesus' life can be sketched just by the writings of Celsus, independent of any other documents in Jewish or pagan antiquity.
 - **Celsus (wrote in AD 175-180)**

- Jesus existed as a man.
- His personal name was Jesus.
- He was called *Christos* in Greek.
- He had a brother named James (Jacob).
- He won over both Jews and Greeks.
- Jewish leaders had unfavorable opinions of Jesus.
- Pilate rendered the decision that Jesus should be executed.
- His execution was by crucifixion (specifically).
- He was executed during Pontius Pilate's governorship.




What Tacitus and Josephus Tell Us (Mykytiuk)

“There is a type of Christian faith, . . . rather strongly represented today, (that) regards the affirmations of Christian faith as confessional statements which the individual accepts as a member of the believing community, and which are not dependent on reason or evidence. Those who hold this position will not admit that historical investigation can have anything to say about the uniqueness of Christ.”

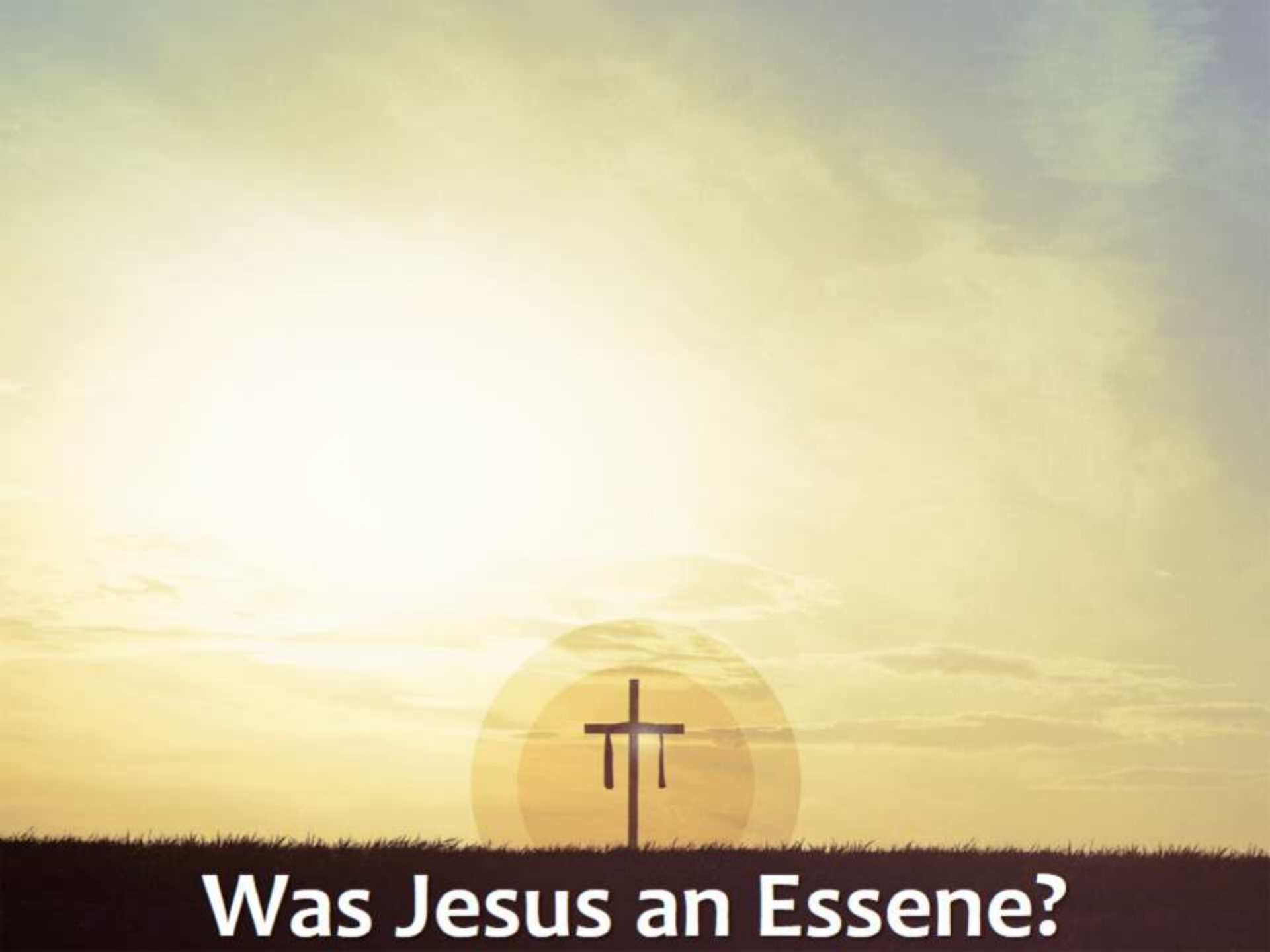


Millard Burrows, Yale Professor, DSS Expert

“They are often skeptical as to the possibility of knowing anything about the historical Jesus, and seem content to dispense with such knowledge. I cannot share this point of view. I am profoundly convinced that the historic revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth must be the cornerstone of any faith that is really Christian. Any historical question about the real Jesus who lived in Palestine nineteen centuries ago is therefore fundamentally important.”



Millard Burrows, Yale Professor, DSS Expert



Was Jesus an Essene?







מיקוה סהרר
MIKVAH BATH

- It is true that Jesus was not a Pharisee or Sadducee (the other two major groups), but that does not necessarily mean He was an Essene.
- The Essenes had withdrawn from others in Jerusalem, while Jesus spent time with sinners.
- The Essenes adhered to meticulous ceremonial cleanliness laws, while Jesus did not.
- Jesus opposed legalism, while the actions of the Essenes could be classified as legalism.



Was Jesus an Essene?

- Their views on the Messiah are different than those Jesus claimed for Himself. They were looking for two (or even three according to some researchers) who would fulfill Messianic claims.
- They were private, whereas Jesus' ministry was public.
- Jesus was more positive toward the faith of Gentiles than the Essenes were.
- Jesus was more missionary-minded than the Essenes.
- Jesus did not emphasize angelology as they did.



Was Jesus an Essene?

- It is sometimes asserted that Jesus traveled to exotic places during the “silent years” from 12-30 years old, such as India, Japan, or Egypt.
- One legend states that Jesus went to Egypt and Japan in a “search for wisdom.” Donovan Joyce proposed that Jesus did not die on the cross but lived until age 80, dying in defense of Masada.
- In *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, Richard Leigh and Michael Baigent propose that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and was not crucified.



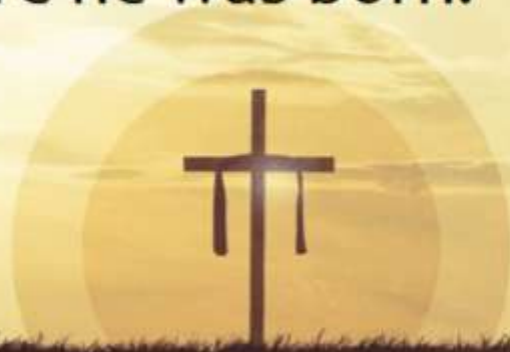
Was Jesus just a Traveling Guru?

- There are several arguments against this viewpoint:
 1. The trustworthiness of the gospels, as well as the early date of those documents, contradicts the evidence offered for alternate theories.
 2. The arguments for Jesus not surviving the crucifixion are hard to overcome.
 3. The proposals of Jesus as a traveling guru are often contradictory in details.
- These proposals have not gained traction in religious scholarship.



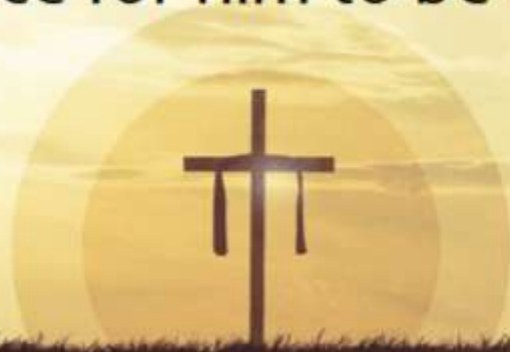
Was Jesus just a Traveling Guru?

“Born in an obscure village, he was the child of a peasant woman. Growing up in another out-of-the-way and disdained village, he worked in a carpenter shop until he was about 30. Then, for three years, he was an itinerant preacher who both talked and listened. He helped people whenever he could. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never went to college. He never had a family of his own or owned a home. He never traveled over 200 miles from the place where he was born.”



Jesus' Historical Impact

“He never did any of the things that usually accompany greatness and had no credentials but himself. While he was still a young man, the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. He was turned over to his enemies. He went through a mockery of a trial, after which he was executed along with two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for the only piece of property he owned – a coat. Only because a generous friend offered his own cemetery plot was there a place for him to be buried.”



Jesus' Historical Impact

“Nineteen centuries have now come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race. The leader of the column of spiritual progress. The ultimate example of love.

It is no exaggeration to say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the kings who have ever reigned, all the congresses that have ever convened, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as that One Solitary Life.”



Jesus' Historical Impact

“When I was asked which single individual has left the most permanent impression on the world, the manner of the questioner almost carried the implication that it was Jesus of Nazareth. I agreed.”



- H.G. Wells, in “The Three Greatest Men of History”

“In sum, the whole case for the nondivine Jesus who stumbled into Jerusalem and somehow got crucified by nobody and had nothing to do with the founding of Christianity and would be horrified by it if he knew about it—that the whole picture which has floated in the liberal circles I frequented as an atheist for thirty years—that case was not made. Not only was it not made, I discovered in this field some of the worst and most biased scholarship I’d ever read.”



- Anne Rice, *Out of Egypt* Afterword

- Jesus was historical. He existed in space and time.
- The evidence points to a person and not a myth.
- We can compare this historical foundation to the foundations of other world religions.



Conclusion