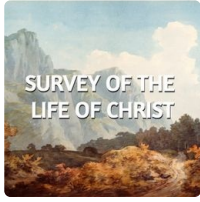


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Historical Sources and Background (Part 1)



Survey of the Life of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this piece, Steve Gregg discusses the historical sources and background of Jesus' life and teachings. He suggests that while some institutions may have veered away from his original intentions, Jesus' teachings have had a significant impact on changing culture. Gregg emphasizes the importance of continuing Jesus' words to truly be his disciples, and asserts that the Gospels and other historical sources provide reliable accounts of Jesus' life and teachings. While there may be differing opinions and limited knowledge, studying Jesus remains essential for understanding Christian theology.

Transcript

This series on the life of Christ is a much shorter version of what we typically do in a school year here at the Great Commission School. I think the longer version is 95 tapes or something like that, something very close to that. 95 90-minute tapes.

So we're talking about a lot of, what, 130-something hours of teaching on the four Gospels in our regular series, which tapes, of course, are available. We're not covering the entire life of Christ in that kind of detail in this year. And so we are having a summary of the life of Christ as you are studying the Gospels on your own.

There are certain things I'd like to clarify. There's a lot of information available to us about the Gospels and about the times of Christ, which are not found in the Gospels, which is helpful to be apprised of. And we will, in this 10-session series, just sort of survey relevant matters and also survey the entire life of Christ in a rather surface manner.

We will look at the entire four Gospels contents in a short period of time, which means we will mostly skim, but you will get the big picture. Sometimes when you read the Gospels, there's enough detail about a given story, and then there's a lot of detail about the next story and the next, that you begin to get caught up in the individual stories, which is a legitimate thing to do. But when you're done, the big picture, the flow of events has been missed.

And so we will be covering it more in that way, surveying the life of Christ. And for those

who, of course, want more detail on any given portion, we have the detailed tape series as well. I want to first begin by identifying four excellent reasons for studying the life and teachings of Jesus.

The first reason would be the historical reason. There is. A phenomenon that has been very prominent, very visible in the world for the past 2000 years, which is called the Christian church.

And obviously, as all things have a beginning, the Christian church had some kind of a beginning. There may be more than one theory as to how the Christian church began, but according to the scriptures, of course, it began with a group of followers of this man, Jesus of Nazareth, whose life is presented to us in the Gospels. And because of their conviction that this man was the son of God and that he died for our sins and rose again and was seen by many subsequent to his resurrection and sent his spirit to 120 followers on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem in approximately the year 30 A.D., that this began the movement that is forever since been known as the church, the Christian church.

And there are many things, of course, that have transpired and evolved in this institution so that there are many things in the modern church that may not resemble exactly what it was at the beginning and therefore out of historical interest alone. We would have value in studying what Jesus said and did and knowing what it was that was the basis for the founding of this this institution. Now, of course, once we look at that life and those teachings carefully, we can also see where the institution may have veered away in some ways from the original intention of the founder.

But the Christian church, even to a person who is not a Christian, is a matter worthy of attention if for no other reason than that all the great world religions are worthy of attention. There are millions of people, billions who adhere to the various religions of the world. Christianity is possibly the most important, certainly would be to those living in the part of the world that we are in, because Western society has been affected by Christianity.

Just our society is shot through with it, with the teachings of Jesus and of the church to the extent that if we did not know the origins, there would be an enormous and significant gap in our knowledge of history and of our own times. And so the whole historical significance of the church throughout history and the desire to know how it came about and have authoritative answers as to what its roots and foundation is would be, to my mind, valid reasons to study the life of Christ in itself. Just there's that historical reason.

It can be said without any attempt at propagandizing or without any fear, I think, of being accused of overstatement that Jesus of Nazareth is the one man above all others who has changed history. There are parts of the world that have been much more affected by people other than Jesus. For example, of course, the Muslim world is much

more affected by the teachings of Muhammad.

But the Muslim world has not really dominated world history in any significant way. Maybe it will in the future. We are not able to make predictions about the future of these things.

But in terms of the past, it is certainly the Western world for the past 2,000 years that has led the rest of the world in exploration, in invention and cultural development, and education and human rights improvements and all kinds of things. And I don't think I'm saying that as one who is a product of Western culture and therefore prejudiced in its favor. As a matter of fact, I have many complaints about Western culture and many areas in which I disagree with it.

But I think it's simply an objective statement that history has been more impacted and more significant. Historical things have happened in the past 2,000 years in Western culture than in any other. And certainly it is clear even to this day that the European slash American mindset and language and culture has affected the whole world, with the exception of those areas that are strongholds of some other religion like Islam.

But even a place like Japan, which is not in any sense a Western nation, and Africa and South America and many other places, are very much eager to, in a sense, assimilate Christian or nominally Christian, Western Christianized concepts and culture. And that is important for anyone who hopes to understand history and the present time to know something about the church and its impact and why it has impact, why it exists. It says in Galatians 4, 4 that in the fullness of times, God sent forth his son.

And Jesus had such a tremendous impact. Probably partly because of the timing of his coming. We don't know what factors all contributed to God's desire to send Jesus at the time he did.

The blasphemous rock opera that came out in the early 70s, Jesus Christ Superstar, has Judas speculating after the death of Jesus. In that rock opera, Jesus does not rise from the dead, but Judas does. Or at least Judas speaks the final epilogue after his own death.

He's talking again. And Judas raises the question, you know, why did you come at this obscure time before mass communication? And, you know, maybe you could have had a more beneficial impact on the world had you come at a better time. Well, this is, of course, a vacuous criticism of the timing of Jesus' coming because, after all, who can say that Jesus hasn't impacted the world tremendously? Although he came at a time when there was no mass communication.

There were many things in the historical setting that made the coming of Jesus at the time that he came more fortunate, more providential, we could say. Then had he come earlier or even later, we'll have another occasion to look at those historical surrounding

details. But it is nonetheless the case that Jesus entered the world at a point in history that was custom made for his appearance.

And he changed history from that point on. And even if a person were not a convinced Christian, they would have to admit that Jesus has been the most influential man in history in terms of changing the world. And so we have historical reasons for studying his life.

And I say even if we were not Christians, we would have those same reasons. Secondly, and this is closely related to that, and I've alluded to it already, is the cultural reason. In addition to the fact that Jesus has changed history and by studying the life of Jesus, we gain some historical perspective and historical background on this present phenomenon of the church.

The cultural reason has to do with the fact that his teaching and the church's teachings have in all ways permeated Western culture. And as I mentioned a moment ago, really much of the rest of the world, too. And so to understand our own culture requires very much that we become aware of what Jesus did and taught.

It's amazing how many books quote Jesus without knowing they're quoting him. How many things that Jesus said have entered into the very jargon of the man on the street and are yet not recognized as being from Jesus because the man on the street has perhaps never studied the life of Jesus. But the way we think the very concept of there being a golden rule is not at all taken for granted in other societies, but it's just sort of almost foundational, even among those who don't profess to be Christians.

They believe it is at least right, even if they don't practice it. And so our culture is very much shot through with the ideas that have come from the teaching of Jesus and have have continued to our time. James Stewart, the late Scottish evangelist, wrote a book on the life and teachings of Jesus.

And in that book, he said, quote, The teaching of Jesus, even though great multitudes throughout the world are still outside its sphere, even though many of his own followers have never cared or never dared to put it fully into practice, has had a power and an effect with which the influence of no other teacher can even for a moment be compared. Unquote. And that's an interesting observation.

Not only is it the case that the teaching of Jesus has had a cultural impact beyond that of anyone else. It's also interesting that most of his teaching or his teaching in general has not been disseminated throughout the entire world yet. It's going fast in that direction.

And also those who know his teaching and seek to embrace it do not put it fully into practice. And yet these deficiencies have not prevented the power of his teaching from taking hold and changing our culture to a very significant degree more than anyone

else's. And so there's a cultural reason to understand history and to understand culture are two different reasons for studying the life of Christ.

Now, to the Christian, there's an additional reason, and that is a theological reason for studying the life of Christ. Genuine Christianity has got to be defined in terms of what Jesus taught. Not in terms of what tradition has taught throughout the ages, even Christian tradition.

And every person who lives at this late point in time and encounters Christianity encounters it in the form of some religious movement, some institution, usually some denomination. And as such, the exposure we receive to Christianity initially is usually colored through the lenses of that denomination's own emphases. Sometimes that denomination's own blind spots.

And to know exactly what true Christianity is means that we must somehow get behind those traditions that we picked up when we first were exposed to Christianity. Those traditions of the particular group or individual that led us to the Lord and get back to the roots of it and see exactly what Christianity is. Because we believe that Christianity or following Jesus Christ is what is what salvation is about.

We believe that Jesus came to be a savior and a Lord. And as a savior, he seeks to save us from our our sin and from the eternal consequences of sin. As Lord, he seeks to dictate our behavior and our lifestyle and to mobilize us like a commander mobilizes an army.

In order for us to be mobilized in the way that he wants and to be saved from sin and its consequences, it's necessary that we have the genuine article and not some corrupted version. When we say that I'm counting on the fact that I'm a follower of Jesus, that I'm a Christian for my salvation and for an understanding of how I'm to live my life. That means I'd better have the real thing or else the salvation I think I have may be more imaginary than real.

And the ethics and the principles by which I govern my life may be misguided because they may actually end up being the traditions of man and not the teachings of Jesus himself. The true theological basis of genuine Christianity, as opposed to some human corrupted version of the same, is to go back to what Jesus himself said and did. Jesus was the model for the Christian life and he was, of course, the teacher who arbitrated what Christianity really means, what true is, what is true.

Jesus said the truth will make you free. But he said, if you continue in my words. Then you are my disciples, indeed, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.

So to know the truth requires that we continue in Jesus words that no doctrine could be

considered orthodox and authentically Christian. Apart from its agreement with what Jesus taught is established in many places in Scripture, not not the least of all in Jesus own statements on the subject. But also Paul brings this up in First Timothy, chapter six and verse three.

First Timothy, chapter six, verse three, Paul says, if anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. And to the doctrine which accords with godliness. That person is proud, knowing nothing, is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words from which come envy, strife, reveling in suspicions, useless wranglings and so forth of men of corrupt minds.

Now, the deciding point of whether a person has is caught up in the wranglings of men of corrupt minds or whether they are upholding wholesome words. And the true doctrine, according to truth and godliness, is whether what they are consenting to is the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. If anyone teaches otherwise, does not consent to the wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, there are many Christians that hold doctrines that are not really consistent with what Jesus said. I'm sure that many of them believe they are consistent with what Jesus said, though I'm afraid they must not have done very much careful reading of what Jesus said in order to reach their conclusions. And there are many Christians, by the way, who don't even believe that following what Jesus said is relevant to Christians today.

There is, of course, the extreme dispensationalism that teaches that Jesus didn't even teach for us. He was teaching for the Jews. There is this doctrine that Jesus taught what he hoped the Jews might accept in that he was presenting them with the option of a political Jewish kingdom.

And had they accepted it, his teachings would have been put into place as the law of the kingdom. This is what dispensationalism teaches. But according to this view, the Jews rejected the kingdom.

And therefore, his teachings are not relevant until he comes back and sets up his millennial kingdom, and then they'll be relevant. In the meantime, we have a different set of words to follow, and that's those of Paul in his epistles. Now, of course, this suggests that Paul's writings are different.

That is, with the contents of what Paul taught, it's different than what Jesus taught. And what Jesus taught is not for us. That's for a different dispensation.

Only what Paul taught is for our dispensation. These people are certainly professing Christians, and they might even be real Christians. God only knows.

But if they are, they are very, very far from understanding what the Bible says is the essence of Christian theology. It's what Jesus said. The wholesome words of our Lord

Jesus Christ is what is to be taught.

And if Paul taught anything contrary to that, then Paul is to be rejected. Now, I don't believe that Paul is to be rejected. And the reason I don't is because I don't believe Paul ever said anything that's contrary to what Jesus said.

There are occasions where Paul admits that he is going beyond the things that Jesus said, but he's simply taking the teachings of Jesus. He's extending them out to a new situation that Jesus never addressed. But what he teaches is consistent with what Jesus said.

And so the teachings of Jesus are all essential for defining what true Christianity is, as opposed to some corruption of the same. In Second, John and verse nine, John is writing to someone that he calls the elect lady, possibly an actual woman, also possibly a church.

There are different opinions about that, which will probably never be resolved from the evidence available. But in Second, John, he says this elect lady. In verse nine, whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ, that's the teaching of Christ.

Does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ or the teaching of Christ doctrine means teaching has both the father and the son. So if you can determine whether a person has God or doesn't have God, by whether they stand by the teachings of Christ, the doctrine that Jesus taught.

And that's agreeable. Paul said, of course, the wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ are that by which wholesome doctrine and good doctrine is to be judged. Then, of course, fourthly, there's a personal reason.

There's, as I said, a historical reason for staying the life of Christ. There's a cultural reason. There's a theological reason.

No correct doctrine. But there's also a personal reason, and that is that if we as individuals hope to be followers of Christ disciples. Then it's necessary for us to know what he said, because discipleship is defined as following the words of Jesus.

I quoted a moment ago, John 8:31, where Jesus said, if you continue in my words, then you are my disciples. Indeed. So to be a true disciple requires that we continue in his words.

How can we do so if we don't study and know what it is he said? It also says in Matthew chapter 28, verses 19 and 20, Jesus sent his disciples with this commission. Matthew 28, 19 and 20. Jesus said, go and make disciples of all nations.

Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching

them to observe all things whatsoever. I have commanded you. So he says, you make disciples and you do this, at least in part by teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.

So if continuing in his words makes one a disciple, indeed. And if making disciples means teaching them to observe what he commanded, it follows, of course, that discipleship is nothing else but following Jesus and obeying his words. And so for personal reasons that I want to be a disciple, I am motivated to follow Jesus.

And there are many, Jesus said, who in that day, presumably meaning the day of judgment, will think they were disciples. But apparently we're judging that matter by some wrong standard because they, in fact, were not true disciples, according to him. He says in Matthew seven, beginning at verse 21.

Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name and done many wonders in your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.

Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock and the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house. And it did not fall for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand and the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house and it fell.

And great was its fall. Now, Jesus said, it's not everyone who says, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom, but those who do the will of my father in heaven. Well, how do we know what the will of the father is? There were he says many will think that they had done the will of the father because they prophesied in Jesus name.

They cast out demons in Jesus name. They done mighty works in Jesus name. Isn't that the will of God? Well, how would one know? Well, Jesus said, those who hear these sayings of mine and keep them.

As opposed to those who hear these sayings of mine and do not keep them. That's the difference between somebody whose house stands in the day of judgment and that person whose house falls in the day of judgment. True discipleship, of course, requires that we hear what Jesus said and we do it.

In another place similar to this, in Luke chapter six, Jesus said, Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and you do not do the things which I say. So for very personal reasons, the Christians should be strongly motivated to study the life of Jesus. It's my personal

favorite portion of the Bible, although I love really virtually every part of the Bible.

I mean, I really enjoy the study of every part of the Bible. But when I'm studying the life of Jesus, I really feel that I'm saying that which is the most essential thing for me to know. Because the most essential thing to know for salvation is to know Jesus and to know him as Lord, which means you know yourself to be his follower.

And so studying the life of Christ is directly applicable and practical for us, for our own discipleship. So that we know what we should do from reading what Jesus said and seeing his life. And we know what we should believe for salvation.

That's the doctrinal aspect. So we have all those reasons for studying the Gospels. Of course, the first two would be reason enough even for a non-Christian to want to study the life of Jesus.

If a person styles himself to be a scholar and an intellectual, but has never read the Gospels, in fact, the whole Bible for that matter, but especially the Gospels, that person obviously can't be, his claim to scholarship simply can't be taken seriously. I mean, anyone who hopes to be a well-rounded intellectual would have to have some personal study that he has done into the source of this phenomenon in the world called the Christian church and of the Christian influence on Western culture that has permeated the whole world. And a person who shows no interest in that shows only religious bigotry rather than genuine concern for historical or cultural or general literary scholarship.

By the way, I didn't mention the literary, but that falls under the category of cultural. But the literature of the Western world is just totally replete with allusions to Jesus and to his words, even when it doesn't mention him by name. All right.

So I hope with these few words to establish the fact that studying the life of Christ is a worthy pursuit and actually one that is the most important of all pursuits, to know Jesus, to know him. And the next question we have to raise is, how can we know somebody who lived so long ago? He is, of course, an historical character. And to a certain degree, to a very large degree, knowing him requires that we know about him and we can know about him the same way we know about other historical characters.

I make a distinction between knowing him and knowing about him, because obviously you can know a great deal about Jesus. You can grow up in Sunday school and hear all the stories from the Gospels and believe everyone to be true and never know him, never meet him. Just as you can know everything there is to know about any famous person.

You can do a doctoral dissertation on Alexander the Great and you can know everything that's ever been written about him. But that wouldn't mean that you know him. You have no personal contact with the man.

Knowing somebody and knowing about them are two very different things. I would say,

though, that if you know somebody, but you don't know very much about them, you don't know them very well. If somebody would ask me, do you know Abby? I could say now, yes, yes we've met.

But do I know very much about her? No, not very much. Almost nothing. Now, if it became the most important thing in my life to know somebody well, Jesus is, of course, the person who to know well is the most important thing anyone can ever know.

And for me to say, well, yes, I've met Jesus, I know Jesus, but I don't know much about him would be to speak of a very impoverished kind of relationship. On the other hand, if a person only knows about him and has never met him, that's even more impoverished, perhaps. To know him and to know about him are both parts of what we need and what is very much rewarding to our pursuit if we know him and if we know about him.

Now, studying the Gospels is how we know about him. There are people who don't study much. They would just emphasize that they have a personal relationship with Jesus.

You don't have to read about you. Don't read the book when you have the real guy. You know, when you really have Jesus in your life, what do you need to read about him for? They would say.

And they depend very heavily upon internal and personal and subjective impressions that they have, which they consider God told them or Jesus showed them or Jesus was leading them here or there or something like that. And I would I would not at all want to discount the validity of such subjective and internal knowledge. Knowledge of Jesus, I know him that way, too.

However, if I would never read the Gospels, I would be very much susceptible to deception as to these, the origin of these subjective impulses. In fact, as a matter of fact, I have, even though I know the Gospels and know Jesus from the Gospels, too. I have on occasions believed that God was telling me something and later found out it wasn't him at all.

I really believe that an impression I had was the Lord and it wasn't. Now, fortunately for me, these mistakes that I've made in my own past have not led me into moral wrongdoing or moral error. But I have even known people who have taken that course.

I know people who were very much caught up in the subjective internal relation with the Lord, but are not so much concerned about the written word because that's, you know, the letter is dead. You know, it's the spirit that gives life. So they say.

And so because they were not interested in the letter, but only in what they'd call the spirit, they just followed the impulses of what they considered to be the spirit of Jesus in them. And I have known not a few who've been led into tremendous moral compromise because they failed to discern what was genuinely the Lord and what was simply

believed to be the Lord, but with some other impulse from some other source. And this is always going to be the case of those who go strictly by a subjective knowledge of Jesus.

Now, I say strictly. As opposed to just saying, you know, I'm not trying to discount those who have a subjective knowledge of Jesus. I have such knowledge.

I hope all Christians do. I would think it a very sad thing for a person to love the Lord and not have a personal subjective relationship with him. And for someone to know all about Jesus and never cross that threshold into actually becoming acquainted with him personally.

That would be a great tragedy. At the same time, as I said, unless we read about him, unless we know what it was that he did and what it was, he said, what it was he stood for, what it was he approved, what it was he disapproved. We will not have an absolute certain way of knowing that the experience I'm having or the impressions I'm receiving are from him.

Because we have to decide, are these impressions agreeable with what Jesus taught, with what Jesus did or not. And unless we read the Gospels and study his life, we will never really be able to answer that question with certainty. So I am convinced that Christians need to know Jesus subjectively, but they need to know about him objectively.

And the Gospels give us the story about Jesus and encounter with him through the Holy Spirit gives us the knowledge of him. But these two, you don't you don't move from one. You don't graduate from one to the other.

You don't. It's not as if, well, OK, I read the Gospels. I now know what's in there.

Now, I've graduated from that. I don't need that anymore. I can just go on to my impressions about Jesus.

I believe that I have come to know the Lord more intimately through my in-depth studies of the Gospels over the years. Then then I could possibly have, of course, without that study. So I am very convinced that knowing Jesus and knowing about Jesus are essential.

But to know about somebody who's historical requires that you have some historical sources. We cannot see Jesus today unless he vouchsafes to us some special supernatural vision. And that has happened to some people.

Paul, for example, had occasions where Jesus appeared to him once on the road to Damascus and a couple of other times on record in the book of Acts. That is a very rare thing, though, it occurs, it seems. I mean, most of the good Christians I know who followed Jesus for years have never had such a vision as that.

And therefore, we can't just hold out for these visions in order to see Jesus. He is a

historical person as well as a living person today. But he lives today and relates with us through his spirit.

We do not see him or touch him or feel him as the apostles had opportunity to do. And as such, the actual things he did, the things he audibly said to his audiences are known to us only through historical records. The same as if we were studying any other person who had lived in the past and was no longer available for us to look at, to hear with our ears and so forth, as the apostles did.

So we need sources. We need to know that we have reliable sources. If somebody says, well, I don't need to worry about that because Jesus just talks to me every day.

Well, perhaps he does. That's fine. But does he go through and tell you his life? Does he go through and repeat the Sermon on the Mount? Does he teach everything to you individually that he taught in the Gospels? I doubt it.

I doubt it. And he did not intend for us to be without the written record. It's true.

Jesus never wrote anything, but he commissioned his disciples and told them that the Holy Spirit would help them to remember all things that he had said, all things that he had told them and that they should become witnesses of these things. And their witness was committed to writing and what we call the four gospels and to a certain extent in the epistles as well. So the study of the life of Christ in these sources is essential.

Now, there are, of course, people who doubt that Jesus ever even existed, living now two thousand years after the time of his sojourn here on Earth. A person might feel that they have the liberty to say, well, I don't know if he even existed two thousand years. That's a long time ago.

Who knows what happened back then? Who knows if we can trust the sources? It is often said that the gospels cannot really be trusted because they are religious documents. They are they are religious propaganda. They were written by believers.

I've never quite understood how that translates into a verdict of them being forgery. I don't know on what set of presuppositions we could proceed if we believe that every religious person was incapable of telling the truth. The embracing of religious ideas does not render a person a liar instantaneously.

In fact, most religious persons, even who hold to the most bizarre and transparently worthless cults, are truly believers in what they profess to believe. In other words, if a Jehovah's Witness comes to your door and teaches you something that is plainly unbiblical, that person is probably not a deliberate deceiver. That person is probably fully convinced of what he's saying.

He may be wrong. But at least we cannot say that his beliefs have made him a

deliberate liar. I'm not going to say there aren't any deliberate liars among them.

I can't even say there aren't any deliberate liars among Christians. But we must say that the embracing of religious ideas does not transform a person instantly into a deliberate liar. So that whatever they say and whatever they leave record of, we must just discount it altogether because that was written by a Christian.

As a matter of fact, there is some reason to believe that embracing Christianity has made men who were formerly liars into men who are scrupulous about truth and willing to die for the things that they affirm to be true. There is much historical evidence of this fact. Now, that a person is a Christian, of course, does not prove that he's an honest man.

We have had too many scandals in our own lifetime in the religious world to leave us so naive as to believe that every religious man always tells the truth. But at the same time, the men who wrote the Gospels, their testimony shouldn't be discounted simply because they were religious men. If we can use the word religion of them.

I mean, because they happen to admire Jesus, it is argued that they embellished the story. In fact, some have argued that they made it up altogether and that there never was a Jesus. Now, those who take this latter radical position that there never was a Jesus are not historians.

This is something you need to be aware of. Those who doubt the witness of the Gospels are not historians. Historians accept the Gospels as essentially reliable historical records as they claim to be.

There is no historical reason to discount them. When you hear of people who either deny that Jesus existed or they believe Jesus existed, but they believe he is a very different kind of person than that depicted in the Gospels. These people are not historians ever.

You'll never find a historian who believes that. Professional historians look at the Gospels and say these are very high quality historical documents. We have in the four Gospels essentially four independent witnesses to an individual's life.

And much detail given by all four where there's overlapping and so forth. We'd be very happy to have such good witnesses to the life of almost any other famous historical person. It is said that the detailed firsthand witness to the life of Christ that we have in the Gospels is superior to the firsthand reliable historical witness we have about any other famous historical person of ancient times.

It's very unusual to have the persons who actually knew the man write biographies of him and have four of them is almost unheard of. And therefore historians have never questioned whether Jesus of Nazareth lived and they have usually not seriously questioned whether he said and did the things recorded there. Now I'm saying I'm not

saying that the historians recognize the Gospels as inspired documents as maybe the Christians do.

I'm saying that by the way the Gospels never claimed that they're inspired documents. If they are inspired that is a Christian conviction that is held about them but they never claim that they're inspired. Each one of them simply claims to be telling a story that is true about an individual that they knew.

And that being the case a historian without a religious bias will look at them say well this is tremendous. I mean here's a here's an ancient figure lived 2000 years ago and four men three of them essentially eyewitnesses. And one of them an acquaintance of eyewitnesses.

These are very very close to the source good detailed historical records. And you will never find a man who is a scholarly historian doubting that the Gospels are essentially true. I mean they might they might believe there's a little bit of here and there of misstatement or embellishment.

But they believe that essentially the Gospels are reliable historical documents not necessarily infallible but basically reliable substantially so. Now where you find a person who has an alternative opinion about the Gospels. You find a person not who's a disinterested historian but you find a person who is an ideologue or a person with a theological agenda.

Madeleine Murray O'Hare founder of the American Atheist Society and her followers their their official position is that there never was a man named Jesus of Nazareth all records to the contrary. They know I guess somehow they just know by divine inspiration although they don't believe in the divine. They just know there never was such a man notwithstanding the fact that there are historical records from contemporaries people who knew him people who quoted him non-Christian authors who mentioned him of the first century.

But somehow by just some kind of intuitive spark of genius. Madeleine Murray O'Hare realizes this man never lived. Now it's hard to know how anyone living 2000 years after the alleged lifetime of a person could say with certainty that any that he never lived.

That is of course to affirm a universal negative such and such person never existed. That's fairly ridiculous for anyone to take a position even if they're not a Christian. Because first of all we don't if I said to you there is a guy named Joe Schmo who lived a thousand years ago.

And you said no there wasn't. I mean it seems like the burden of proof would be extremely heavy upon you to prove that such a person did not exist. Now you might say well the burden of proof relies on me to say that he did.

But if I say well it's in my it's in my family records. We've got some someone who said he lived and he you know here are the results of his life. He had these children grandchildren and so forth.

And you could say well that well the documents are forged the documents are fictional. Well OK. It's possible to say that.

But how do you prove it. I mean how do you. It would not be necessary for me to prove the existence of someone beyond the fact that some contemporary left a written record of him.

As much as the burden of proof would rest on the person to deny that that person lived. And on what basis could such a denial be sustained. What piece of evidence could be brought up to say this person never existed.

Obviously I'd be very difficult to do. And the American Atheist Society of course under Madeline Murray O'Hara is is not an intellectual or scholarly organization in the least. They are almost an anti intellectual movement and their opposition to the Gospels really adorns the Gospels.

And to have such enemies as that is a compliment to any written records because people who know so little that are willing to make such irrational and anti scholarly statements about historical information. I'd like those people to be my critics. It makes you look so much better to have critics like that.

But there are others who are not atheists and who are not necessarily in the position to what wish to deny that Jesus existed. There are those who believe that there was a man named Jesus but they believe the Gospels are not necessarily reliable accounts of his life. I'll have more to say about these before our lecture is done.

These would be what we call the essentially the liberal scholars since the end of the last century who have called into question whether the Gospels can be accepted as they stand. The most publicized example of this movement is the so-called Jesus Seminar which in the last several years has published their book The Five Gospels which includes Matthew Mark Luke John and the Gospel of Thomas wherein they went through all the alleged sayings of Jesus from all these sources and voted among themselves. Seventy something scholars voted among themselves as to whether this saying was authentic and whether that saying was authentic and whether this saying was authentic.

And each saying was evaluated on a standard that allowed a high degree of certainty that he did say it. A not very high degree of certainty that he did say it. A very high degree of certainty that he didn't say it.

And a not so very high degree of certainty that he didn't say it. There are four options for each saying and they were evaluated by the voting using colored beads. The sayings

that were authentic were judged so by the scholar throwing a red bead into a box.

And if the saying was thought maybe to be somewhat close to being authentic but not exactly so, a pink bead was used. If the saying was thought to be really not at all anything Jesus said but probably something he would have no objection to, a gray bead was used. And if the saying was judged to be something altogether contrary to what Jesus even believed, then a black bead was used to vote on it.

And so the 70 scholars would throw these beads into a box upon consideration of each saying. And having done so, they would count up the colors and they'd give each equivalent. A black bead was worth zero, a gray bead worth one, a pink bead worth two, and a red bead worth three.

They would take the numeric equivalent of all the beads that had been cast as votes, come up with the total number, and divide it by the number of scholars who voted and come up with an average and that would determine whether the saying was authentic or not. They called this scientific historiography. This of course is just plain showmanship.

This has nothing to do with science. And yet, all the major news magazines have given front page coverage on multiple occasions to the results, the assured findings of the so-called Jesus Seminar and say, well, modern scientific methods have now been applied to studying the history of Jesus. And we've decided less than 20 percent of the things that Jesus said in the Gospels were actually ever said by him.

And the Gospels are rather, as they say it, not at all the product of eyewitness testimony, but rather they are the product of maybe a generation or two later, of later Christians, after a time where the story of Jesus had been embellished in the fond memories, not too accurate memories, but very fond memories of the disciples. And Jesus had evolved in their thinking from simply the Jewish cynical sage that they believe he was to in the mind of the Christians. By this time, he had evolved into a God who did miracles and rose from the dead, things that never really happened, but which found their way into these later literary productions called the Gospels.

A couple of generations after Jesus. And they say this kind of thing happened all the time. Famous people were elevated to deity in Greek literature and so forth.

And so this is where the Jesus Seminar stands. And if they had not been so much publicized, there'd be no reason to dignify them with even a mention of their existence, because they are so plainly non-scientific in their approach, so obviously biased against all things supernatural and against Christianity that they're hardly worthy of mention. But it is because of people like Madeline Murray O'Hare and her group who deny that Jesus even existed, or people like the Jesus Seminar who say, well, of course, Jesus existed, but the Gospels don't really depict him in the way that he really was.

They are a more pious, religious propaganda that arose a couple of generations later that reflect not so much who Jesus was or said, but what the church wanted to believe he was and what they wanted to believe he had said. It's because of these kinds of challenges to the historicity of the gospel records that we need to look at the question of whether we have reliable sources. If you want to get to know about a historical person, the first order of business is to find out if there are any reliable sources.

And the Gospels, of course, are the very best sources. But before we look at them as sources, I want to answer the question that people often ask is, is there any evidence outside of the Gospels for the existence of Jesus? And there is, of course. There is, both in pagan and Jewish sources.

Now, when we say pagan, we mean usually Greek or Roman writers who were not Christians. In the first century, men who had not, you know, they lived in the Gentile world before the Gentile world became Christianized a couple of centuries later. And when we say Jewish sources, we mean, of course, people who were hostile to Christianity, Jewish in religion and therefore resentful of Christianity as a religion.

And the reason for looking at these sources is not so much as to say, well, these are the most authoritative sources we can get on the life of Jesus. But, you know, when you quote the enemies of Christianity, people who did not believe in Christianity would have wished it had gone away and who definitely did not say anything with a mind to confirming Christianity because they did not believe it. And yet the things they say actually affirm and confirm the things that the Gospels say about Jesus in some measure.

Then we have very good source material that no one can claim was part of a religious propaganda to promote belief in Jesus. It may indeed have been religious propaganda of another sort trying to criticize Jesus. But it's interesting if someone wants to say, was there a Jesus? Did he die on the cross in the days of Pontius Pilate and so forth? You can confirm these basic facts.

You're not going to find any detailed biographies of Jesus written by non-Christians in the first century. And we can hardly expect it to be otherwise than it is. Why would a non-Christian historian go to the trouble of writing a detailed biography about a man who in the first century was not recognized throughout the Roman world as being very significant? It wasn't until two centuries or three centuries later that Christianity became the religion of the empire.

During the entire first century, Christianity was a small emerging sect. Most people thought it was a sect of Judaism. Eventually, it was simply an illegal religion that was thought to be a cult, the leader of which was a criminal by Roman standards.

He had been crucified as a result of being condemned in a Roman court of law of treason and of other trumped-up crimes. But the point is, there was nothing about Jesus of

Nazareth that would have led a first-century historian to know that this man was going to be important enough to do some serious detailed history on. Only the people who believed in him really recognized that he was important enough to write about.

So we shouldn't consider it to be suspicious that the better records of the life of Jesus have come to us from the pens of people who believed in him. I dare say that most of the detailed biographies of individuals today have come from the pens of people who in some measure respected or admired those people. Of course, some biographies are written for the purpose of tearing people down.

But if somebody wrote a biography of Winston Churchill today, we would not think that the statements in that biography were suspect for the simple reason that the writer happened to be an admirer of Winston Churchill. We would be surprised that a man would write a biography of Winston Churchill if he were not an admirer of his. And thus also, it should not be thought a criticism of those who wrote the Gospels to say, well, we can't trust what they said about Jesus because they admired him.

So what? Furthermore, if the disciples indeed believed in Jesus, rather than rendering their accounts about him suspect, it should raise the question, why did they believe in him? If they wrote things that were not true about him, that leaves open the question, why would they believe in him? If the impressive things about him that inspire belief, which are written in the Gospels, were not actual occurrences, then what was the real situation that led these people to believe that Jesus was the Son of God? The most reasonable way to answer the question of how did these people come to believe that Jesus is the Son of God and a miracle worker is to suggest that the things they wrote about him were true, that they saw with their eyes the things that they wrote about and that impressed them. And how could they not become impressed by such things? In other words, we should not allow the critics to simply dismantle the Gospels and disqualify them as historical records for the simple reason that they were written by persons favorable to Jesus. We don't disqualify any other biographies on the market because of that consideration.

And that is obviously showing undue prejudice against Christianity, which by the way, exists in abundance among those who are critics of the Gospels. Those who criticize the Gospels as a career are those who have very strong personal religious reasons to wish the Gospels to be untrue. And different persons who do so have different reasons.

Madeleine Murray O'Hare and those of the Atheist Society make no bones about it. They live immoral lives and they do not wish it to be true, what Jesus said. I would dare say that the Jesus Seminar wish it is hope it is not true also, because they make a career of doing things that Jesus condemned.

Jesus said, if a person causes one of these little ones who believes in me to stumble, it's better for him than a millstone were put around his neck and then he'd be cast into the

depths of the sea. If that statement is true, the people in the Jesus Seminar who've made a career of stumbling, people who believe are in grave danger of their souls. Also, of course, they are people who make a great deal about being scholars, although they expose themselves as very poor ones by their methods.

But scholarliness is a thing that in certain circles gives a man reputation. And yet Jesus said, although the Jesus Seminar denies that he said it, Jesus said, I thank you, Father, that you've hidden these things from the wise and the prudent and revealed them to babes. It doesn't take a scholar to meet Jesus, and sometimes it takes a scholar to miss him.

Jesus said that these things are hidden from the wise and the prudent in many cases, but they are revealed to those who have no such affectations of scholarship. I'm not saying one can't be a scholar and be and really know Jesus. There are very good evangelical scholars who no doubt know the Lord very well, probably as well as I do or better in some cases.

But at the same time, scholarship does not give a person an advantage in knowing whether Jesus exists or not. Those, as I say, who are scholars of a historical sort rather than those who have theological agendas, they never have a question about whether Jesus lived or whether the Gospels essentially tell us the story of his life. Now, what sources do we have outside the Gospels? Let's talk about those before we talk about the Gospels in detail.

Outside the Gospels, there are limited references to Jesus. We do not find a great number, but what we find are helpful. We do not find much detail about the life of Jesus outside of the Bible, but what we do find is agreeable with what the Bible says on it.

So we could say this. The majority of the material in the Gospels remains unconfirmed from outside sources, but it also remains unrefuted from outside sources. What little there is in outside sources does confirm some little parts of what the Gospels say.

None of it refutes it with the exception of some religious propaganda from the Talmud, which we'll talk about in a moment, which deliberately goes against what the Bible says about Jesus, but we will even examine and see whether the Bible or the Talmud has a better evidence of being reliable. Cornelius Tacitus is one of the pagan sources, one of the non-Jewish sources that we have something about. He's probably the most important of the pagan sources, and we don't have much from him, but he was the greatest Roman historian during the days of the Roman Empire, and his life was from 55 A.D. to 117 A.D., and therefore his childhood was very near the time of Christ himself, which is not important because in writing the histories of the Empire, he did not rely on his own eyewitness testimony, but on the records that were available to any historian at the time.

But he is regarded in his many books he wrote, many volumes, to be the greatest Roman historian of the period. And in one of his volumes, when he was writing about the rumor that Nero had started the fire that burned much of Rome, and everyone knows the story how a great portion of Rome was burned down, and a rumor circulated that Nero himself had burned the city down in order to gain glory by rebuilding it. And he was kind of a madman, as is known from history.

No one knows for sure whether Nero really did start the fire or not, but the rumor was significantly troublesome to him that he sought a scapegoat to blame it on. And according to Tacitus, and I quote him here, quote, Therefore, to scotch the rumor, Nero substituted as culprits and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men loathed for their vices whom the crowd styled Christians. Christus, which is simply the Latin form of the name Christ, from whom they got their name, had been executed by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate when Tiberius was emperor.

Now, this man lived close enough to the time that the records in the Roman archives would certainly be still fresh. The ink would hardly be dried on them. And Pontius Pilate would have been required to have filed with the government the accounts of those that he executed in Palestine.

And even Tertullian, writing later on, I don't have any quotes from him here, but later on, Tertullian writing a defense of Christianity to the emperor actually made reference to the fact that certainly you'll find records of this of Pontius Pilate's reports about all of this in your archives in Rome. Now, from Tertullian's mention of it, there's been two opinions that have come. Some have believed that Tertullian actually knew of such and had seen such records.

He was a person who had a very exact knowledge of Roman law. Others feel that he had not seen them and that maybe they don't even exist, but he just assumed they would exist because he was convinced of the story, knew that Pontius Pilate would have to record such things. But it's interesting that Tertullian did make reference while writing to the Roman authorities, made reference to the fact that their own files should have something from Pontius Pilate on this subject.

But apart from what Tertullian said, we have that of Tacitus, who is no Christian. Tertullian was a Christian. Tacitus was not a Christian.

And he mentions that Christ had been executed by sentence of Pontius Pilate when Tiberius was emperor. Now, this confirms three things of importance agreeable with the gospel. One is there was a person named so-called Christ.

Secondly, he was executed. And since it was by a Roman procurator, we can assume he was unless he was a Roman citizen, he'd be crucified. There's two ways the Romans would execute people.

If they were a Roman citizen, they'd cut their head off like they did Paul. Or if they weren't a Roman citizen, they would crucify him. Now, Tacitus does not mention whether this Christ was a Roman citizen or not.

So there's at least a 50-50 chance that the execution referred to is by crucifixion. Of course, we have other records that make it clear that it was by crucifixion. But we have also the mention of the time period.

This was by Pontius Pilate when Tiberius was emperor. So we have the very time period that the gospels speak about. Jesus' mystery began in the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar, and he was crucified three years later.

So we would say that some basic things are confirmed here by this external record. The existence of Jesus Christ, his execution by command of Pontius Pilate, and the essential timing of his career and of his death during the reign of Tiberius Caesar. That's not very much to go on, but it certainly confirms his existence and the most basic facts of the timing of when he lived and how he came to his end, physically speaking, humanly speaking.

There's another source. This doesn't give us much. A man named Thallus in 52 AD wrote a history of Greece and its relations with Asia from the Trojan War to his own time.

And his works no longer exist. They have not survived to the present time. But in the third century, a man named Julius Africanus, a Christian writer, did have Thallus' work and quotes from them.

There are many cases like this of writers whose works have perished. No modern scholar has ever laid eyes on them because they don't exist anymore, as far as we know. But we know of them and we know their contents because early writers who still had them quoted them.

That would seem to be the case with Papias' writings also. But Thallus is quoted in 221 AD by Julius Africanus in a place where Africanus is talking about the supernatural darkness that fell on Judea, I guess on the whole world, when Jesus was crucified. And Julius Africanus writes this, Thallus, in his third book of his histories, explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun, unreasonably, as it seems to me.

Now, what's interesting is that this darkness did occur. And it occurred at daytime, so that a Greek historian explained it away as an eclipse of the sun. However, Julius Africanus says this seems like an unreasonable explanation to me, and it certainly is an unreasonable one, because Passover is the time of the full moon.

And there cannot be an eclipse of the sun at a full moon. Simply, what causes an eclipse and what causes a full moon are opposite circumstances. And therefore, that there would be darkness at noonday, or at the middle of the day, during full moon season,

which is Passover, when Jesus was crucified, essentially, it's impossible to explain that as an eclipse.

And yet, a Greek historian knew of it, too, so it must have not just been localized. It must not have been just cloud cover, or something, in Judea. It must have been something that affected the sun itself.

And so, this doesn't confirm very much about Jesus, but it does confirm a particular miracle that the Bible mentions. And we find a Greek historian not believing in Christianity, finding some other way to explain that miracle, but an explanation that doesn't really work. There was a man named Mara Bar-Serapion.

Very little is known about him, but a letter that he wrote to his son has survived and has been preserved. He was writing from prison. He was a Syrian, and he lived probably in the latter part of the first century, sometime after 73 A.D. We don't know much about him, but he was apparently in prison for his convictions.

He was a prisoner of conscience, and he wrote a letter encouraging his son to stand by his convictions, regardless of the kind of opposition or persecution he would get for them. These were not Christian convictions, though. The man was not a Christian.

He was a pagan, a Syrian, and in writing to his son, we have this paragraph, among others, quote, 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 that their kingdom was abolished.

Now, this, simply put, is a very early witness of a pagan man who mentions the crucifixion of Jesus as being just as historical, and took it for granted that it was historical, just as much as Socrates and Pythagoras were historical characters. He's simply an early witness as a non-believer in Christianity who accepted the historical veracity of the story of Jesus and his death. Not a very important witness.

We don't know much about the man, but just another interesting little confirming tidbit from the first century. Now, more important than the pagan witnesses and sources are the Jewish sources, because Jesus interfaced with the Jewish people during his lifetime. They were his principal opponents.

And so the contemporary Jews would know more than the pagans would. Jesus never really did ministry in pagan lands. So whatever the pagans knew, they knew by hearsay.

The Jews, to a certain extent, knew by first-hand witness that there was a man named Jesus and sometimes made reference to him. The Talmud and the Midrash, which are the written, I should say now written, traditions of the elders. You remember that Jesus

would conflict with the Pharisees frequently over the traditions of the elders.

These traditions of the elders were oral traditions the rabbis had hammered out ever since the Babylonian exile. They had this evolution of a development of theology and behavior and practice from the rabbis. Significant rabbis would give their judgment about a thing, and other rabbis would have another opinion, give their judgment about a thing, and they'd each have their followers and they'd preserve their sayings and their decrees and so forth.

In the days of Jesus, these rabbinic traditions were called the traditions of the elders. The Pharisees were defenders of the traditions of the elders. Jesus didn't have much respect for them.

But in the third centuries, these were written down. And what the Jews have today in the Talmud, in the Midrash, in the Gemara, are basically the written form of these traditions that were passed down orally for centuries. And that time of oral transmission includes the time of Jesus' lifetime among the Jews on earth.

And therefore, you do find frequent references to Jesus in the Talmud. None of them flattering. All of them are very hostile.

They're blasphemous. In fact, one Talmudic scholar said, if you would look for the most blasphemous statements in literature about Jesus Christ, the Talmud would be the place to look for them. He's usually referred to as the illegitimate son of Mary.

They believed that he was, or I don't know whether they believed it, but they claimed that he was the son of a Roman soldier who had raped, or in some other way, taken advantage of Mary so that Jesus was simply a bastard child of a Jewish girl and a Roman soldier. The Talmud usually refers to Jesus as the hanged one, alluding to the fact that in Deuteronomy, there was a curse uttered upon anyone who was hanged on a tree. So they reveled in referring to him as the hanged one, as the cursed one.

And they referred to him also as the son of Pantherus. And no scholar is really certain why they referred to him as the son of Pantherus. Some feel that Pantherus is represented as the name of the Roman soldier who Mary is alleged to have had relations with, and therefore Jesus was the son of this man, Pantherus.

Others believe, some scholars believe, that Pantherus is a corrupt form of the Greek word parthenos, which is virgin, and that either accidentally or on purpose, the Talmud has corrupted the word virgin, based on the fact that the Christians claim that Jesus was the son of a virgin, that they've changed the word parthenos to Pantherus for whatever reasons of mockery or whatever, or simply by accident. It's hard to know, but there's no question that the man Jesus of Nazareth is the person so alluded to by these titles. There's one passage in the Talmud, it reads this way, Now this passage is a good

example of the kind of stuff you'll find in the Talmud about Jesus.

It's a mixture of historical fact and propaganda, fiction. Now, of course, it agrees with several things. One, it agrees with the fact that there was a man named Yeshu, or Jesus of Nazareth.

It also agrees with the fact that he was hanged on the Passover, the eve of the Passover. Those confirm what the Gospels say. It is also said that he was accused of sorcery and led people astray.

Well, that isn't really the charges that were brought against him by the Jews or the Romans for his crucifixion, but as a matter of fact, we read in the Gospels that the Jews sometimes said that he was a sorcerer. They said he was doing his miracles by Beelzebub, the prince of demons. So, that the Jews of a later time would say, well, he was accused of sorcery, is agreeable with even what the Bible says the Jews said about him at the time.

Now, where there is difference, of course, is that they say that before his execution, a herald went 40 days throughout Jerusalem, apparently seeing if anyone could come to his defense, and no one did. And they were planning to stone him. He's going forth to be stoned, but no one came to his defense, so they hanged him.

This, of course, is just plain ridiculous. For one thing, the Jews would not send a herald throughout Jerusalem saying they're going to stone this man for the simple reason that the Romans did not allow the Jews to stone people. They stoned Stephen, but they did this in a spontaneous mob action and then dispersed before the Romans could intervene.

Attempting to do the same thing to Paul later on, they failed because the Romans did intervene. The Romans gave the Sanhedrin the right to do many, many things and to govern the country, but they did withhold from them the right to execute people. And that is why, in fact, the Gospels represent it much more historically soundly, that the Jews condemned Jesus to die in their own court, but then they had to persuade Pilate, the Roman, to find some other charges so that Pilate would agree to crucify him.

And by the way, the Romans would not stone, they would crucify. It is the truth that the Jews would sometimes stone a person, but they would do so quickly. They would not take 40 days announcing they're about to do so.

The Romans would certainly have intervened in such a case. So, the story in the Talmud simply does not ring true historically at all, whereas the Gospel accounts are all very, very true to life. And furthermore, we would say that the Talmud writers would have reason to try to vindicate themselves more.

You see, the Gospel accounts tell us that the Sanhedrin was sort of a kangaroo court and they violated many, many of their own laws in trying Jesus the way they did. There's

been a book written about the illegal trial of Jesus that I think documents, oh, a score or more, of Jewish laws that were broken by the Jews in the manner in which they tried Jesus. But in writing about the story themselves, we would expect the Jews to color it a little bit differently, make it sound like they were much more fair-minded, and looking for people who might have some evidence in his favor and so forth.

And finally, they couldn't find any, so they killed him. What we can see here is largely a true account that agrees with the Gospels, and the point in which it disagrees with the Gospels, it is historically not true to life. It is much less likely to be the correct version than the Gospels are, which are known to be agreeable with the culture and the law of the Jews and the Romans of the time.

So, we have at least from the Talmud, although it is hostile to Christ, a further confirmation of the basic outline. It even says that he was accused of being a sorcerer. This is interesting because they never denied that he did miracles, they just reinterpreted them as sorcery.

This is to the chagrin, of course, of the modern scholars, who claim that Jesus never did or pretended to do any supernatural things, and that those records of the miracles in the Gospels are simply the development of later Christian, you know, wishful thinking. The liberals today say that Jesus never pretended to do a miracle, never did a miracle, he was just a sage, just a guy who had some wise ideas, and people embellished the memory of him to the point where they eventually had him working miracles in their recollection, but not in reality. But, of course, the Jews, who were hostile to him, never denied that he did miraculous things.

They simply reinterpreted them as sorcery. They almost confirm, in fact, that he did miraculous things. Now, the most important Jewish witness about the Gospels is Flavius Josephus, who, I believe, was born in 35 AD in Jerusalem, in the very time and place that the apostles were preaching after Pentecost.

Josephus grew up there. He never became a Christian, as far as we know. He was a Jew and not friendly toward Christianity.

And he wrote two very large volumes. He wrote more than that, too. But he wrote a history of the Jews called Antiquities of the Jews, and he also wrote a history of the Jewish War called the Wars of the Jews, or the Jewish Wars.

And in Antiquities of the Jews, he happens to make some references to events that confirm gospel information, though Josephus would never have had probably any opportunity to be in contact with the Gospels, and he does not write these things as if he got his information from the Gospels. He has, for example, in Antiquities, Book 5, and Chapter 2, he says, with reference to a defeat of Herod's armies that took place in battle, Josephus said, Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came

from God as a punishment for what he did against John, who was called the Baptist. For Herod had put him to death, though he was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both to justice toward one another and piety toward God, and so to come to baptism.

Now, that's not very much, but that's a pretty good summary of John the Baptist's ministry and very agreeable with what the Bible says on the subject, although it gives some different details, and the Bible gives different details. This is an independent record of the career of a man that all four Gospels record. John the Baptist is at the beginning of all four Gospels as the forerunner of Christ.

And so, although there's no mention of Christ in that passage in Josephus, the confirmation of the ministry of John the Baptist is an independent confirmation of the veracity of what the Gospels say about that man. Now, there's two references to Christ in Josephus. One is undisputed, and the other is disputed.

The undisputed reference mentions Jesus' brother James and his death, and it's in the context of the death of James that he also mentions Jesus. In Antiquities, Book 20, Chapter 9, and Paragraph 1, Josephus writes, So Ananas the high priest assembled a council of judges and brought before it the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ, whose name was James. That is, the brother of Jesus was named James, together with some others, and having accused them as lawbreakers, he delivered them over to be stoned.

Now, here is a reference to the fact that there was, A, a man named Jesus, B, he was so-called Christ. Some people believe he was the Christ. C, he had a brother named James.

All of this is confirmed in the Gospels. This is an independent confirmation of Christ's existence, of his being declared to be Christ early on in Israel, and of his having a brother named James. Now, what's interesting about this is that Josephus could never have gotten this information from the Gospels or from Acts, because neither the Gospels nor Acts record the death of James.

Josephus' information must have been from other sources. He might have even been there to witness it, since he grew up and lived in that city at that time. And, therefore, we have a totally independent Jewish historian recording that there was a man named Jesus, called Christ, he had a brother named James.

That doesn't tell us much, but it certainly makes it clear there that Jesus was not a fictional character. Yes? So, he was stoned? James was stoned. Yes, actually, according to Eusebius, James was thrown off a precipice of the temple and beaten with clubs.

But, apparently, the judgment was that he should be stoned. Apparently, the mob got out of hand and did more than just stone him. Now, we have another very important reference to Christ in Josephus, but this one is disputed.

It's disputed because it's so important. And it seems to be such an important proof of who Jesus was that critics of Christianity simply try to find fault with it. Now, it does have some problems in it, and that is simply this, that there are portions of the quote, and I have underlined them in your handout, where Josephus talks as if he were a Christian, and yet we know he was not a Christian.

And that makes it difficult. Some say Josephus couldn't have written this, only a Christian could have written it. But there's a better explanation.

Let me read the reference to you. This comes from Antiquities, Book 18, Chapter 3 and Paragraph 3. Now, obviously, that sounds like it was written by a Christian. And since Josephus was not a Christian, and hardly anyone but a Christian could be imagined as saying such things, it has been argued that this is not an original piece of Josephus' writing, that it is an interpolation written by some Christian editors later on and stuck in there in order to confirm the existence of Christ.

However, there are several things to raise as questions to this hypothesis. One is that all the extant manuscripts of Josephus contain the passage. That is, we have a number of early manuscripts of Josephus.

None of them omit this. All of them contain it. If you had some manuscripts that had it and some that did not have it, one could conclude that maybe the original didn't have it and the later manuscripts that have it would include an interpolation.

But as far as textual evidence is concerned, we'd have to accept its authenticity because every manuscript of Josephus that is available has it in it. Furthermore, scholars of Josephus, and even non-scholars who read Josephus, can immediately recognize Josephus' style of writing. He's very wordy, very long sentences, very distinctive way of expressing himself.

And scholars have pointed out that this passage is in all points agreeable with the style of Josephus' writing, with the material before it and after it and throughout Josephus. So we have two reasons to believe that the passage is authentic. It's in all the old manuscripts, and stylistically it blends with the rest of Josephus' writings.

In fact, the only thing that can be said against it being authentic is that it says things that sound Christian. Now let me just suggest this too. If a Christian wrote it and wanted it to sound as if Josephus wrote it, then a Christian would probably not have written such overtly Christian sounding things since the early Christians knew that Josephus was not a Christian.

If they're trying to camouflage a phony passage and attribute it to a non-Christian writer confirming the historical veracity of Jesus' existence, they would not have put such overtly Christian statements in it. It would give it away as something not likely that

Josephus would say. If they were trying to do something dishonest here and make Josephus appear to be a witness of the story of Christ, they would have left out those things that give it away as an almost Christian statement.

There is, to my mind, the best way of dealing with this passage is to recognize that many times in the passing down of manuscripts, in the recopying of manuscripts, occasionally words and phrases and even whole lines are left out by accident by a copyist. It's much less likely that they're going to interpolate new material from scratch, at least accidentally, but it's very easy to assume that a person writing something down might accidentally leave something out and not know he had done so. And by the passing down of Josephus' work, it is possible that a word or two got changed or left out.

We don't know that this is so, but we don't know that it isn't so, and it happens often enough in the transmission of ancient documents. And there are a few things which, if they have been changed, could easily account for this passage being authentic from Josephus. If you look at the backside of your page, it's possible that some of his statements were made ironically, like his statement, if indeed we should call him a man, sort of ironically mocking the Christians, you know, these people claim he's not a man, but do we dare call this Jesus a man? Well, I call him a man, he says.

Now, when it says, a teacher of men who received the truth with pleasure, the Greek word for truth, very similar to the Greek word for strange things, and may well have been corrupted in the copying process. It may be that Josephus actually wrote, a teacher of men who received strange things with pleasure. Furthermore, when he says, this man was the Christ, it might have originally said this man was the so-called Christ, or this man was so-called the Christ.

We know from the other passage about James, which is not a disputed passage, that Josephus referred to Jesus as the so-called Christ. And since we knew he did so in another passage, there's no reason to doubt that he would do so in a passage like this, but a copyist may have left out the so-called part. Also, when it says, for he appeared to them on the third day alive again, the divine prophets having spoken these and a thousand other wonderful things about him, it's entirely possible that that originally included a phrase like, as they claim, or as they said.

Not that Josephus was affirming these things be true, but that he was representing what the Christians claim about Jesus, not necessarily putting his endorsement on the claim. If that is the case, if these corruptions have taken place in Josephus, and no one can prove that they have or have not, but it is a theory that is at least as good, if not much better, than the theory that there's a total interpolation of a whole paragraph into Josephus' work by a Christian writer, then we could read the passage this way. His original may have read something like this.

Quote, On the third day alive again, the divine prophets having spoken these and many

thousands and thousands of other wonderful things about him, meaning all that is what the Christians claim about him. And even now, the tribe of Christians so named after him has not yet died out. We will perhaps never know whether Josephus wrote the passage or not.

That is disputed. But as I say, there are more reasons to accept it as authentic and very possibly slightly corrupted than to say it was created de novo by a Christian author and interpolated into Josephus' work. First of all, that would require that somehow the authentic writings of Josephus would have had to be kept in the charge of Christians so that they could stick something like that in.

It also would not account for the fact that all the manuscripts of Josephus contain it and that the style, if it is a copy, is a very good, convincing copy of his style of writing. It is easier to believe that Josephus wrote something very much like what is there, but perhaps some phrases or words have been changed or dropped out so that it reads more like a Christian statement now than it originally did. Of course, in addition to the pagan and Jewish sources, we have the Gospels as the primary source.

And while there are many who would like to tell us that the Gospels can't be relied upon and they are late documents and so forth, we actually have the testimony of very early Christians to the contrary. One of those is Pappius. Pappius' works have not survived, but Eusebius, the Christian historian, writing in 325 AD, quotes quite a bit from Pappius because Pappius' work was still available in 325 AD when Eusebius wrote and he read Pappius.

And among the things we learn from Pappius, from quotes there, Eusebius quotes Pappius as saying, quote, Matthew composed the Logia, which is translated Saints or the Oracles, meaning the Saints of Jesus. Matthew composed the Logia in the Hebrew dialect, and everyone translated it as he was able, unquote. So Pappius confirms that Matthew wrote the teachings of Jesus.

And you'll find that in the Gospel of Matthew, the teachings of Jesus are far more prominent than, say, in Mark. Mark doesn't have as much of the teachings of Jesus. Matthew has the Sermon on the Mount and many discourses of Jesus that are not found in Mark.

And apparently Matthew's first draft of the Gospel was principally made up of the teachings of Jesus, according to Pappius. And it was written in Hebrew, or Aramaic more likely, a dialect of Hebrew, and later translated into Greek. So that confirms that Matthew is indeed the witness that stands behind the book of Matthew.

It's not someone later who artificially put his name on it. Pappius, by the way, his own lifetime overlapped the change of the first century. Pappius was born during the first century and lived into the second century.

So he was very early, and he said that he had consulted people who knew the Apostles. There's even some reason to believe he may have known the Apostle John. He was the bishop of Hierapolis in the early second century.

He also told us about Mark's Gospel. Mark being the interpreter of Peter, whatsoever he recorded he wrote with accuracy, but not, however, in the order in which it was spoken or done by our Lord. He was in company with Peter who gave him such instruction as was necessary, but not to give a history of our Lord's discourses.

So Pappius attributes the Gospel of Mark to Mark, who got his information from Peter. Finally, we have Irenaeus, who died around 200 A.D., early Christian writer of great importance, and he told us something about the Gospels. He said, quote, against heresies, he said, Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome and laying the foundations of the church.

After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who had also leaned upon his breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.

Unquote. So we have very early witnesses that the Gospels were written by the men whose names they bear, and therefore we have good reason to accept them as authentic. And that is what we know about the sources of the life of Jesus.