

JESUS CHRIST - THE EXTRAORDINARY PERSON WHO LIVED IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD

Could the disciples have invented Jesus?

**SCRIPTURE QUOTATIONS FROM
THE NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE 1995
MARCH 2023**

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Jesus lives in the literature and culture of the world since the Roman Empire.

People who reject the Christian religion frequently rest their unbelief on the assumption that such a man as Jesus Christ could not have existed in the history of the world. They may object that someone with the name of Jesus could have lived but that he could not have been as wonderful or could not have performed such marvelous deeds as have been reported of him. There are even those who maintain that the Jesus of the gospels was a character invented by the early proponents of the Christian religion; i.e., the apostles and writers of the New Testament invented him.

These objections and beliefs are unfounded and this may be seen in the testimony both of the apostles of Christ and of the unbelieving Jews and pagans who were contemporary with the early proponents of the Christian religion.

Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr, who was born in Palestine, (c. 100–167 AD),¹ lived about the same time as the Epicurean philosopher, Celsus. Justin was an early defender of the Christian faith. In his first defense presented to the Roman Emperor Antonius Pius, about the year 140, having spoken of the crucifixion of Christ and its attendant consequences, adds, “And that these things were so done, you may know from ACTS made in the time of Pontius Pilate.” Thus, Justin Martyr confirmed the early history of the church, of the crucifixion of Christ and the evangelistic efforts of the early disciples.

- The reality of Christ and his sufferings are implicit in the statements of Justin Martyr as a defender of Christianity.
- The opponents of Christianity also provide confirmation of the reality of Christ’s advent and His sufferings.

Tertullian

Tertullian², in his defense, A. D. 200, spoke of the crucifixion of Christ and of his subsequent appearance to his disciples; he wrote, “Of all these things relating to Christ, Pilate, in his conscience a Christian, sent an account to Tiberias, then emperor.”

- It is difficult to believe that Tertullian would have so spoken or that Pilate would have written such a letter had the facts not been confirmed before them.

¹ Cabal, T. (2007). *Notable Christian Apologist: Justin Martyr*. In C. O. Brand, E. R. Clendenen, P. Copan, & J. P. Moreland (Eds.), *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (p. 1900). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

² **Tertullian**, Latin in full Quintus Septimus Florens Tertullianus, (born c. 155/160, Carthage [now in Tunisia]—died after 220, Carthage), important early Christian theologian, polemicist, and moralist who, as the initiator of ecclesiastical Latin, was instrumental in shaping the vocabulary and thought of Western Christianity. He is one of the Latin Apologists of the 2nd century.
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Tertullian>

In another part of his defense Tertullian speaks as follows:

“There was an ancient decree, that no one should be received for deity unless he was first approved of by the senate. Tiberius, in whose time the Christian religion had its rise, having received from Palestine in Syria an account of such things as manifested our Saviour's divinity, proposed to the senate, and giving his own vote as first in his favor, that he should be placed among the gods. The senate refused, because he had himself declined that honor. Nevertheless the emperor persisted in his own opinion, and ordered that if any accused the Christians they should be punished. Search, says he, your own writings, and you will find that Nero was the first emperor who exercised any acts of severity toward the Christians, because they were then very numerous at Rome.”

- Would Tertullian have written this in a defense had it not been well known that he cited facts available to people in high authority and to all?
- Further, would he have written that there was an “account of ...things as manifested our Savior's divinity,” had Christ not performed remarkable and notable acts that deserved attention because of their ability to elevate him to consideration of godhood?

Eusebius

Concerning this subject Eusebius³ wrote:

When the wonderful resurrection of our Savior and his ascension to heaven were in the mouths of all men, it being an ancient custom for the governors of provinces to write to the Emperor, and give him an account of new and remarkable occurrences, that he might not be ignorant of anything; our Saviour's resurrection being much talked of throughout all Palestine, Pilate informed the Emperor of it, as likewise of his miracles, which he had heard of; and that, being raised up after he had been put to death, he was already believed by many to be a god. And it is said that Tiberius referred the matter to the senate; but that they refused their consent, under a pretense that it had not been first approved of by them; there being an ancient law that no one should be deified among the Romans without an order of the senate; but indeed because the saving and divine doctrine of the gospel needed not to be confirmed by human judgment and authority. However, Tiberius persisted in his former sentiment, and allowed not anything to be done that was prejudicial to the doctrine of Christ. These things are related by Tertullian, a man famous on other accounts, and particularly for his skill in the Roman laws. I say he speaks thus in his apology for the Christians, written by him in the Roman tongue, since translated into Greek.

- Eusebius confirmed Pilate's account of Jesus' resurrection.

³ **Eusebius**, c. 260-339 A.D. **Eusebius of Caesarea**, also called **Eusebius Pamphili**, (flourished 4th century, Caesarea Palestinae, Palestine), bishop, exegete, polemicist, and historian whose account of the first centuries of Christianity, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, is a landmark in Christian historiography. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Eusebius-of-Caesarea>

- Would Eusebius have said that the resurrection of Christ was in the “mouths of all men” if it wasn’t?
- Such a report would be easy to refute if it were not true.

Tacitus

Tacitus⁴ wrote, speaking of Nero Caesar,

But neither all human help nor the liberality of the Emperor, nor all the atonements presented to the gods, availed to abate the infamy he lay under of having ordered the city to be set on fire. To suppress, therefore, this common rumor, Nero procured others to be accused, and inflicted exquisite punishment upon these people, who were in abhorrence for their crimes, and were commonly known by the name of Christians. They had their denomination from Christus, who in the reign of Tiberius was put to death as a criminal by the procurator Pontius Pilate.

In the quotation above at least three things are established; (1) Christ founded a religion. (2) His followers were called Christians during the reign of Nero Claudius Caesar (AD 54 to AD 68). And (3) Christ so inspired his followers that they maintained their faith in Him even though they were tortured and executed in the most cruel manner by the Roman emperor Nero.

- Would Tacitus, who was regarded as one of the greatest of Latin historians, have risked his reputation by reporting that Christ founded a religion, and inspired such faith in His disciples that they risked torture and death because of their faith if it were not true?
- Such a historical report confirms not merely the existence of Christ, but also His moral character.

Celsus

Celsus was a Greek⁵ philosopher and an early opponent of Christianity. He lived during the late 2nd Century AD. Origen, the Christian apologist, wrote a defense of the Christian faith in which he addresses his remarks to the arguments published by Celsus.

Origen quoted Celsus as saying, "It is but a few years since he [Jesus] delivered this doctrine, who is now reckoned by the Christians to be the son of God." (B. 1, s. 26, p. '21.)

⁴ **Tacitus**, in full **Publius Cornelius Tacitus**, or **Gaius Cornelius Tacitus**, (born AD 56—died c. 120), Roman orator and public official, probably the greatest historian and one of the greatest prose stylists who wrote in the Latin language. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Tacitus-Roman-historian>.

⁵ **Celsus** (/ˈselsəs/; Hellenistic Greek: Κέλσος, Kélsos; fl. AD 175–177) was a 2nd-century Greek philosopher and opponent of early Christianity.[1][2][3] His literary work, The True Word (also Account, Doctrine or Discourse; Greek: Hellenistic Greek: Λόγος Αληθής),[4][5] survives exclusively in quotations from it in Contra Celsum, a refutation written in 248 by Origen of Alexandria.[3] This Celsus might have been of the Epicurean or Platonic school. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celsus>.

- Would Celsus have attributed the delivery of a “doctrine” by Jesus if the philosopher had not known that He existed?
- Would Celsus write that the Christians “reckoned Christ to be the son of God” if it were not true?
- Would not the title “son of God” have elevated Jesus Christ to a high moral position among the populace and among the Christians?

Origen, in his argument against Celsus, wrote,

"Celsus, omitting those things that show the divinity of Jesus, reproacheth Him with those things that are written of Him in the gospels—His deriders, the purple robe, the crown of thorns, and the reed in his hand' (Matt. xxvii.; Mark x v.; Luke xxiii.; John xix.) Whence did you learn these things, Celsus, but from the gospels? says Origen, and tells him that, instead of ridiculing these things, he ought to admire the veracity of those who wrote them, and the greatness of Him who voluntarily suffered such things for the good of men, and bore all with meekness and patience; for it is nowhere written that He bemoaned himself, or that He said or did anything mean and abject when He was condemned." (B. 2, s. 34, p. 81.)

- Celsus accepted the existence of Christ and admitted the extraordinary works that He did.
- Celsus also admitted the sufferings of Christ.
- Origen describes Jesus' extraordinary character by pointing out His patient suffering.

*** For additional information about Celsus and his opposition to Christianity, see separate article entitled, “Celsus” - <https://www.jesusismyth.com/Articles/Articles.htm>

Porphyry

Concerning Porphyry⁶ and his work Eusebius, in his Evangelical Preparation, has these words:

And that evil demons have had no power of doing anything since our Saviour's dwelling among men, the advocate of demons in our time somewhere testifies in his work against us in this manner: And now people wonder that this distemper has oppressed the city so many years, Esculapius and the other gods no longer conversing with men. For since Jesus has been honored, none has received any public benefit from the gods.'

So says Porphyry in those very words shown in the quotation above. (B. 5, c. 1, p. 181.)

⁶ **Porphyry** of Tyre (/ˈpɔːrfiri/; Greek: Πορφύριος, Porphýrios; Arabic: فَرْفُورِيُوس, Furfūriyūs; c. 234 – c. 305 AD) was a Neoplatonic philosopher born in Tyre, Roman Phoenicia during Roman rule. Porphyry was, and still is, also well-known for his anti-Christian polemics. Through works such as *Philosophy from Oracles* and *Against the Christians* (which was banned by Constantine the Great), he was involved in a controversy with early Christians. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Porphyry_\(philosopher\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Porphyry_(philosopher)).

Fill in the blank

1. The _____ of Christ and his sufferings are implicit in the statements of Justin Martyr as a defender of Christianity and its opponents.
2. Tertullian spoke of the _____ of Christ and of his subsequent appearance to his disciples.
3. Eusebius said that Pilate informed the Emperor of Jesus' _____, as likewise of his _____, which he had heard of; and that, being raised up after he had been put to death, he was already believed by many to be a god.
4. In the quotation from Tacitus we may establish the following, (1) Christ founded a _____. (2) His followers were called _____ during the reign of Nero Claudius Caesar (AD 54 to AD 68). And (3) Christ so inspired his followers that they maintained their faith in Him even though they were _____ and _____ in the most cruel manner by the Roman emperor Nero.

Summary of evidence from pagan writers and philosophers

Alexander Campbell, in his book, *The Christian Preacher's Companion*, summarized his references to the statements of ancient enemies and defenders of the Christian faith. He wrote that from ancient pagan and Jewish writers the following facts can be established⁷:

1. That the Jews' religion preceded the Christian, and is of the highest antiquity, and is distinguished by the most extraordinary peculiarities that cause it to differ from every other ancient or modern religion.
2. That John the Baptist appeared in Judea, during the reign of Herod the Great; he was a reformer and a preacher of exceptional abilities; he was of great sanctity of life, and was well received by the people; but was cruelly and unjustly murdered in prison by Herod the Tetrarch.
3. That Jesus, who is called the Messiah, was born in Judea, in the reign of Augustus Caesar, of a very humble and obscure woman, and amidst a variety of extraordinary circumstances.
4. That he was, while an infant, on account of persecution, carried into Egypt, but was brought back again into the country of his birth.
5. That there were certain prophetic writings of high antiquity, from which it had been inferred that an extraordinary personage was to arise in Judea, or in the East, and from there to carry his conquests over the whole earth.

⁷ Alexander Campbell, *The Christian Preacher's Companion*, Lambert Book House, Shreveport. pp. 155-156.

6. That this person was generally expected all over the East about the time in which the gospel began to be preached.
7. That Jesus, who is called Christ, taught a new and strange doctrine.
8. That by some means he performed certain wonderful and supernatural actions in confirmation of his new doctrine.
9. That he collected disciples in Judea, and though Jesus was of humble birth and very low circumstances, he became famous through various parts of the Roman Empire, in consequence of the progress of the Christian doctrine.
10. That Jesus Christ was the founder of a new religion, now called the Christian religion.
11. That while Pontius Pilate was governor in Judea, and Tiberius emperor at Rome, he was publicly executed as a criminal,
12. That this new religion was then checked for a while.
13. That, by some strange occurrence not mentioned, it broke out again and progressed with the most astonishing rapidity.
14. That in the days of Tacitus there was in the city of Rome an immense number of Christians.
15. That these Christians were, during the reign of Nero, or about thirty years after the death of Christ, persecuted to death by that emperor.
16. That constancy [called obstinacy by some pagan governors] in maintaining the heavenly and exclusively divine origin of their religion is the only crime proved against the Christians, as appears from all the records of their enemies, on account of which they suffered death.
17. That in the year AD 70, or before those who had seen Jesus Christ had all died, Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed by the Romans, and all the tremendous calamities foretold of that time by Moses and Christ were fully visited upon that disobedient and gainsaying people.
18. That the Christians made a confession of their faith, and were baptized, and met at stated times to worship the Lord.
19. That in their stated meetings they bound themselves, by the solemnities of their religion, to abstain from all moral evil, and to practice all moral good.
20. That the communities which they established were well organized, and were under the superintendence of bishops and deacons.
21. That Jews, Gentiles, barbarians, of all social classes, and persons of every rank and condition of life, at the risk and sacrifice of the friendship of the world, of property, and of life, embraced this religion and conformed to all its moral and religious requisitions.
22. These specifications, independent of all that is quoted by Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian, from Old or New Testament, in their proper import and connections, do fully contain all the peculiar elements of the Christian religion, as displayed and enforced on the pages of the New Institution.

Such a summary can be fairly made out of the works of the Pagan authors. Indeed, if Josephus, Tacitus, Governor Pliny, the Emperors Trajan, Adrian, and Antoninus the Pious, Celsus, Porphyry, Julian the Apostate, be faithfully and candidly examined, to say

nothing of the Mishna, the Talmud, Philo, and those of humbler fame, we shall find that the facts listed above came from them.

The citations from these pagan writers confirm that the man Jesus most certainly did live in the history of the world at the time alleged by the New Testament and that he was of an exceptional and wonderful personality who taught godly morality and who was associated with extraordinary works.

Anyone having considered the testimonies of writers and historians who lived during or near the time of the rise of Christianity must conclude that an extraordinary individual appeared, one who arose from among the poor people of Galilee and Judea, and who exerted an effect upon the people of that time that gained him recognition not just as a gifted man but as someone who was more than mere man.

The gospels and John

The gospels exist.

The gospels are documents that relate certain details about the life, works and sayings of Jesus of Nazareth. They exist today in almost all of the languages of the world. They exist not only today but they have existed in their original language for nearly two thousand years.

Using popular terminology, there are four gospels,⁸ each written by a man who was a close associate and disciple of Jesus, or of the Apostles of Jesus. These men were Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The documents were written in the common Greek language of the First Century AD. That language is called Koine Greek and was widely spoken throughout the Roman Empire during the period when Jesus lived upon the earth.

They are not imaginary.

The gospels are not imaginary. They have existence such that a person can see them, touch them and read the words they contain. The writers of the gospels wrote their own biographical sketches in different locations and at different times, thus reducing the likelihood that they worked in concert. Yet in each gospel the character of Christ is portrayed in the same uniform manner and the description of Him shows Him to be the same extraordinary person.

The year in which the gospels originated are shown below

⁸ Some biblical scholars would prefer to classify John's work as different from a gospel.

New Testament book – date written.

	Thiessen ⁹	Halley ¹⁰
Matthew	AD 50	AD 60 (into Greek fr. Hebrew)
Mark	AD 67-68	AD 60-70 (from Peter)
Luke	AD 58	AD 60
John	AD 85-90	AD 90 (fr. Earlier Heb. ?)
Acts	AD 61	

The gospels tell of the birth, life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. The works are not detailed biographies, but they contain the testimony of “those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word”¹¹ as it seemed fitting to them to write it out for us in order that we may know the exact truth about the things we have been taught.

Did the disciples invent Jesus?

The thinking of the disciples of Jesus differed markedly from that of their Teacher. For this reason it is unlikely that they could have conceived within their own worldview a character who differed so much from them, and one who taught in such sharp contrast with that of the prevailing doctrines of the time in which the disciples lived.

The student of the bible can readily see the difference in thinking about important subjects if they were to compare the remarks of the disciples with the remarks of Jesus. For example, in referring to the kingdom of God the difference is readily seen. The disciples looked for a kingdom on earth with a visible governmental structure. Jesus, on the other hand, saw the kingdom as primarily the rule of God in the heart. In two references by Luke the thinking of the disciples become evident:

Luke 19:11 While they were listening to these things, Jesus went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately.

- Jesus’ listeners thought that the kingdom of God as a visible governmental structure was about to appear.
- The popular idea of that time was that the Messiah would restore David’s throne to its glory and would throw off the yoke of Roman tyranny. Apparently, this is the view that the disciples held.

Acts 1:6 So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”

- Even after Jesus’ resurrection when He was about to return to heaven the disciples did not understand the nature of the kingdom of God that Jesus taught.

⁹ Thiessen, Henry, *Introduction to the New Testament*.

¹⁰ Henry M. Halley, *Halley’s Bible Handbook*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1965. p. 457.

¹¹ New American Standard Bible: 1995 update. (1995). (Lk 1:2–4). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God was the rule of God

Jesus laid emphasis to the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God. This may be seen in a passage from Luke's gospel,

Luke 17:20 Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; 21 nor will they say, 'Look, here *it is!*' or, 'There *it is!*' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst."¹²

The New American Standard Bible 1995 adds the footnote: "the kingdom of God is within you." And this is in keeping with a comment by Alfred Edersheim:

A review of many passages on the subject shows that, in the Jewish mind, the expression 'Kingdom of Heaven' referred, not so much to any particular period, as in general to *the Rule of God*—as acknowledged, manifested, and eventually perfected. Very often it is the equivalent for personal acknowledgment of God: the taking upon oneself of the 'yoke' of 'the Kingdom,' or of the commandments—the former preceding and conditioning the latter.¹³

And,

While thus the acknowledgment of the Rule of God, both in profession and practice, was considered to constitute the Kingdom of God, its full manifestation was expected only in the time of the Advent of Messiah.¹⁴

Therefore, as the disciples regarded Jesus as the Messiah they were perhaps thinking that the outward and visible establishment of the kingdom was imminent, but that was not the thinking of Jesus. He was attempting to tell them that the kingdom of God was inward and spiritual, and its influence was primarily on the heart.

Thus, it is much less likely that the disciples would have invented such a Messiah considering the difference in thinking they held regarding the kingdom of God.

Jesus and reward vs. the disciples

The disciples were ambitious. They sought reward and glory.

Another example of the difference in the way the disciples and Jesus thought about rewards may be seen in the example of sons of Zebedee. Mark wrote,

Mark 10:35 James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." 36 And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" 37 **They**

¹² *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*. (1995). (Lk 17:20–21). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

¹³ Edersheim, A. (1896). *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Vol. 1, p. 267). New York: Longmans, Green, and Co.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Edersheim, A. (1896). (Vol. 1, p. 268).

said to Him, **“Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory.”** 38 But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” 39 They said to Him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. 40 “But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”¹⁵

- The disciples were openly seeking glory and power for themselves.
- Jesus deferred to God to make such choices.

Jesus and glory vs. the disciples

Jesus rejected the idea of entering the kingdom in order to gain glory and power. Jesus proposed quite the opposite: the greatest in the kingdom would be its slave. Mark wrote,

Mark 10:41 41 Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John. 42 Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. 43 “But it is not this way among you, but **whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.** 45 “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Such an attitude toward glory indicates the stark difference between the disciples and that of Jesus. This means that it is unlikely that the disciples would have invented such a character as Jesus.

Jesus and suffering vs. the disciples

The disciples evidently believed that Jesus would declare himself to be the long promised Messiah as a prelude to acquiring great political power. Jesus rejected this idea also. Matthew wrote,

Matthew 16:21 From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. 22 **Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.”** 23 But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”

In this instance Peter’s conception of Jesus’ elevation to power differed considerably from that of the Teacher. Worse still, Peter’s idea was an impediment to God’s rule.

¹⁵ In all cases where scriptures are highlighted in bold print the emphasis is mine. Author.

Jesus and the kingdom vs. Peter

When the authorities came to arrest Jesus, Peter showed his attitude toward the government representatives in Jerusalem. He had determined to defend Jesus from them.

Matthew 26:51 And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. 52 Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword.

John wrote,

John 18:10 Simon Peter then, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave's name was Malchus. 11 So Jesus said to Peter, "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?"

Peter used his sword; Jesus did not resist the authorities with force. Clearly, this indicates a wide difference in attitude between Jesus and His disciples.

Jesus and self-denial vs. Peter

In the same passage Jesus revealed His attitude toward submission to the Father's will versus assertion of one's own will as Peter had done.

John 18:11 So Jesus said to Peter, "**Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?**"

Such a wide divergence in attitude toward adversaries indicates that the disciples would **not** have conceived of a suffering Messiah, one who willingly accepted the abuse of enemies as the necessary will of God.

Jesus' insight vs the insight of the disciples

The insight of Jesus into the practices, and teaching of the Jewish authorities as compared to the disciples.

Matthew recorded the following,

Matthew 16:5 And the disciples came to the other side of the sea, but they had forgotten to bring any bread. 6 **And Jesus said to them, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."** 7 **They began to discuss this among themselves, saying, "He said that because we did not bring any bread."** 8 But Jesus, aware of this, said, "You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? 9 "Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up? 10 "Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets full you picked up? 11 "**How is it that you do not understand** that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 12 Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The disciples frequently misunderstood what Jesus said to them because of their earthly and material mindset. This points out further that the thinking of the disciples

differed considerably from Jesus' thinking. Such incidents as this indicate a wide difference in the thinking of the disciples and Jesus, thus ruling out the idea of a contrived character.

Jesus' courage vs the disciples

Measure the courage of the disciples with the courage of Jesus.

The courage of the disciples was physical; the courage of Jesus was moral. The disciples could fight with the sword, but they would shrink from criticism. Jesus would not veer the slightest in his course of truth.

Matthew wrote,

Matthew 26:31 Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.' 32 "But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." 33 But Peter said to Him, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away." 34 Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." 35 Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You." All the disciples said the same thing too.

- Jesus said they would deny him.
- Peter vowed to be loyal unto death.
- All the disciples said the same thing.
- The moral courage of Jesus in contrast with the physical courage of the disciples argues that the disciples did not invent Jesus, but described Him as He revealed Himself to them.

Matthew said further,

Matthew 26:53 "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? 54 "How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?" 55 At that time Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as you would against a robber? Every day I used to sit in the temple teaching and you did not seize Me. 56 "But all this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets." Then all the disciples left Him and fled.

- Jesus would not defy the authorities in Jerusalem.
- All the disciples "left Him and fled."

Jesus and Justice vs the Jews

The incident of the woman taken in adultery¹⁶ illustrates the difference between Jesus and those who advocated strict observance of the rigors of the Law of Moses. In this case Jesus showed how mercy triumphs over rigidly applied law. Would the disciples have seen the incident in the same way? Not likely; the disciples were instructed in the Law of Moses and knew its penalties for bad behavior.

¹⁶ John 8:3-11.

Jesus and tradition vs the Jews

In the case of the paralytic¹⁷ whom Jesus healed before an audience of scribes and Pharisees one can see how Jesus valued mercy and faith. The scribes and Pharisees believed and taught that no one could forgive sins but God alone. Jesus said that He had power on earth to forgive sins. So, He said to the paralytic, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you." Thus did Jesus juxtapose for them the abilities of the Son of Man and the power of God. In this way did the thinking of Jesus differ with his Jewish adversaries.

- Would the disciples have seen this confrontation turn on the authority of the Messiah and the power of God? Not likely.

Jesus and inherited guilt

The healing of the man who was born blind from birth provides insight into the understanding of the disciples and the knowledge of Jesus regarding inherited guilt. John wrote,

John 9:1 As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. 2 And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.

Jesus' answer to their question was totally out of conformity with what they thought and expected. In fact, they provided him with two possible answers. He rejected both.

This incident indicates that the Jesus of the gospels is not an invention because He did not conform to their expectation of a teacher of morality.

Jesus and hypocrisy vs the Pharisees

Many of the Jews believed that an outward show of religion was enough. For this reason Jesus called them hypocrites. Jesus emphasized moral purity within the heart.¹⁸

- Is it likely that the disciples would have invented such a character as Jesus who so openly opposed and denounced the Pharisees as hypocrites?

Did the disciples invent Jesus?

Were Matthew, Mark, Luke and John capable of such a fabrication?

The characters produced by historians, biographers, or fiction writers all bear the impress and image of the individuals of the period in which the fictional character is portrayed as having lived. Compare Shakespeare's characters; examine the Satan of Milton. Consider the occupations of the disciples. They were ordinary people. They were fishermen, a tax collector, and a physician. Yet they produced a description of an extraordinary man who differed from them in knowledge, wisdom, insight, moral character and purposeful dedication.

The disciples themselves wrote the narratives telling about the things that Jesus said and did; and their writings depict a person quite at variance with themselves in almost

¹⁷ Luke 5:18-26.

¹⁸ Matthew 23:13-36.

every aspect of personality. Jesus' knowledge is much greater than theirs; His ethics are qualitatively superior; His actions are not merely different from what they could be expected to do, but are frequently so inconsistent that a reader of the gospels must conclude that the writers were bystanders and witnesses to someone whose methods and manners agreed not at all with their predilections. Yet, the summation of the gospels depicts one character, one individual, one extraordinary person even though they are written in four different viewpoints, by different men, at different times and at different locations.¹⁹ There was no previous agreement among the writers on a plan or design—no concerted action governing the testimony to be delivered²⁰; nevertheless, they described one man, yet someone more than mere man: the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth.

Did the disciples invent Jesus?

- If yes, then they have performed a miracle greater than any that has been attributed to Jesus, for they have created the one perfect character; and they created this character without influence from their own worldview.
- If yes, then they have produced a perfect system of morals. Consider the Beatitudes and their superiority to the rules of man.
- If yes, then the disciples have portrayed a person who lived every point that he taught -- to perfection.
- The most reasonable conclusion to reach is that the disciples had before them the Messiah in Jesus of Nazareth. They did not invent Jesus; He was revealed to them in the flesh.

Conclusion: Jesus stands alone. The evangelists did not invent Jesus.

¹⁹ Henry C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1955. The gospel of Matthew was written originally in Aramaic in Palestine in about the year 45 AD; Matthew later prepared the Greek manuscript of his gospel in about the year 50 AD. (p. 132) The gospel of Mark was written at Rome (or possibly Antioch) in about the year 67 AD. (p. 146) Luke was written in Caesarea in about the year 58 AD. (p. 158) The gospel of John was written at Ephesus in about the years 85-90 AD.

²⁰ Ibid. Thiessen, p. 154. Thiessen insists that none of the Gospels is dependent on another canonical gospel for its contents.

Questions

1. Was the teaching of Jesus about the kingdom of God the same as the belief of the disciples?
2. Did Jesus and the disciples have the same attitude toward the duly constituted political authorities?
3. Did Jesus and the disciples have the same regard for reward and glory?
4. Did the disciples expect Jesus to submit to suffering and death?
5. Was the insight of Jesus into the practices, and teaching of the Jewish authorities the same as the disciples?
6. Was the courage of the disciples and Jesus of the same type?
7. How did the justice Jesus provides differ from that of His Jewish contemporaries?
8. Was Jesus' regard of Jewish tradition the same as His disciples?
9. How did Jesus' attitude toward the inherited effect of sin differ from the disciples?
10. Which is more reasonable? The disciples invented Jesus, or the disciples did not invent Jesus,

Answers

Fill in the blank

1. Reality
2. Crucifixion
3. Resurrection, miracles
4. Religion, Christians, tortured, executed

Questions

1. No. They differed.
2. No. Jesus would not defy the established ruling authorities.
3. No. The disciples desired honor and power.
4. No. Peter said, "...this shall not happen to you."
5. No. Jesus possessed greater insight than His disciples.
6. No. Jesus possessed moral courage. The disciples possessed physical courage.
7. Jesus found a way to forgive sin. His opponents tended to enforce the letter of the Law of Moses.
8. Jesus' regard for tradition differed sharply with that of His opponents.
9. Jesus said that condition of a man was to show he works of God in him.
10. The disciples did not invent Jesus is more reasonable. He was revealed to them in the flesh.