

THEY HID THE FOUR GOSPELS

PREFACE

Are the New Testament accounts of Jesus' life and death, the four gospels, possibly true or plausible? One obstacle is knowing when they were made available to read.

Evidence of reasonable publication matters more than the date something was written. It will matter if you want to argue that society could contradict a pile of historical lies when it gets a read at them. If the date is late and the publication is late then we are entitled to refuse to take the gospels as gospel truth.

Publication does not help indicate that the gospels were telling the truth for literacy was low. There is no evidence that the gospels were read to people who could assess them as true. Freeman, *A New Early History of Christianity* at 22 ("it would certainly be unusual to find living eyewitnesses of Jesus' life after AD 60 and it would be a matter of chance as to whether any of these survivors could provide accurate and valuable information").

If we could be sure that the four New Testament gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were censored or largely censored during the first few decades of their appearance we reduce the already weak evidence for the claims the Church makes for the existence and life and significance Jesus Christ considerably. And we can be sure. There is absolutely no evidence that anybody who would have been able to refute the gospels had access to them and there is plenty of evidence that the gospels were kept out of their clutches. Most Christian argumentation in favour of Jesus Christ being a good man and a miracle worker comes from the idea that the gospels were public and well known and weren't debunked by people who thought otherwise. They say for example that if the claims about Jesus in St John's gospel were false this would have been shouted from the rooftops and his gospel would have been forgotten. The New Testament gives no indication that the gospels were well-known or publicised. There is proof that they were not. It is 100% certain that there is no evidence that any part of the gospels that could show that Jesus lived in Israel in the time and way the gospels say.

WHO KNEW NO GOSPELS

If the Gospels existed or were available in the first century, they would have used more by Christian writers and those who were interested in the Christian history.

There is no evidence AT ALL that in the first hundred years after Jesus that anybody had full access to those writings.

Early writings such as the Epistle of Barnabas and Diognetus seriously disagree with the core New Testament teaching that Jews are not to be hated and that their scriptures were taken as factual by Jesus. Barnabas denied that God intended anybody to keep the Law of Moses for it was a code for hidden teachings. That flies in the face of Jesus' teaching that the Law was infallible and would be developed. Clement of Rome, an alleged successor of Peter as bishop of Rome, knows of some gospel traditions roughly and never says he is quoting gospels. His information came from hearsay and he is forced to distort the Old Testament to teach Christian doctrine as if he cannot use the New. The evidence is that those Christians did not have much access if any to the gospels. That concealment would be deliberate.

The historian Josephus would have used the gospels for research and quoted them. He wrote a lot about the time period Jesus lived in and spoke of John the Baptist and Pilate and King Herod. But he didn't even mention Jesus or Christians though a Christian insertion says he did. The early Christians must have been a secret and obscure cult. If they had gospels for the world to read, nobody was interested. Or perhaps their gospels were deliberately hidden. Or perhaps it was the major "historical" parts of them that were hidden. It is likely that if the Christians were not afraid of people looking at their gospels they would have sent them to writers like Josephus to get them advertised by getting quotations from them published.

A very short piece about Jesus that sounds suspiciously like a creed was inserted into the works of the first century Jewish historian Josephus. If Josephus had really mentioned Jesus Christ he would have stated that we must turn to the gospels for further information when he wrote so little. Any decent historian would and Josephus was a clever one. If he really believed that the man Jesus was the most important man who ever lived he would certainly have recommended the gospels when he wrote so briefly about Jesus. If he wrote about Jesus and did not mention the gospels then these books might not have existed as far as he was concerned.

Pliny said that Christ was honoured as a god. If he had known the Gospels he would not have said this. The New Testament

is monotheistic.

The Governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor, Pliny the Younger (62-113 AD), sent his letter to Trajan, the Emperor, in 110 to seek advice on how to stop the spread of the Christian religion which was stealing sheep from his pagan religion for he was puzzled why it was succeeding. The gospels would have been a significant cause of faith if they had existed. If the Christians had had them they would have used them to develop faith in themselves and even more so in the converts for faith cannot be had without evidence. So Pliny would have burnt the gospels instead of being puzzled. His looking for advice shows that the Christians had no evidence to make converts with meaning that they had no gospels or any scriptures maybe apart from the Old Testament. "Though we have no copy of the letter dating prior to the sixteenth century, we know that that copy was drawn from a manuscript of the sixth century that is without significant Christian interpolations. The letter is therefore of 'genuine character'" (page 40, The Jesus Event).

Pliny said nothing about the history of Jesus at all. He said that the Christians were just harmless but depraved in superstition meaning that they believed without evidence and therefore without gospels.

Tacitus, his friend, however apparently said that Jesus who he names only as Christ suffered death under the reign of Tiberias by order of Pilate. He doesn't even say if it was a crucifixion – which he would have done for he spoke revilingly of the Christian faith and was trying to convince his readers it was bad news. Crucifixion was considered a disgrace and a proof that Christ was a charlatan and a criminal who opposed Rome. So we don't know if it was Jesus or how he died but we can be more sure than not that this Christ was NOT the gospel Jesus. Some would say who else could it be? It could be that Balaam in the Talmud who was a Messiah who was hanged on the eve of the Passover. It could be anybody that died who was supposed to have royal blood. Some messianic sects believed that if their founder was killed, he would return from the dead one day - perhaps in several years time. One might argue that there were loads of Christs and since the reliable Tacitus says the Christians were misanthropes and bad news that it was not the sect of Jesus. The Church was first called Christian at Antioch about 50AD and the term means follower of the Messiah. But it stands to reason that many messianic groups surrounding other figures would have called themselves that among other names. It is just like every Christian Church calls itself the Church of Christ but it does not mean they are the same group. The early Church claimed that many Christian groups were too far away in doctrine from them to be really Christians and accused them of inventing a new Jesus.

Philo Judaeus of Alexandria who was born in 15BC, was into studying and writing most prolifically about religious trends in Judaism. He was into tolerance and had an ecumenical outlook. So, why didn't he discuss the value in the gospels? The bulk of the gospel teaching was taken straight from the Great Jewish teachers. It was not original to Jesus. Philo distanced himself from fanaticism which some say was the reason he ignored Christianity. But he went into the Essenes in depth. He could still and would have looked at the teaching of Jesus especially if Jesus was not a fanatic as the gospels imply.

WHY WE MUST EXPECT PARALLELS

We cannot be surprised if we find wordings and stories similar to the gospels in entirely independent sources. The matches to New Testament tradition can be explained as being down to oral tradition and not to somebody having the New Testament.

The parable of the Prodigal Son appeared in the Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:24, a commentary on the Law.

Hillel taught that we must treat others as we like them to treat us which fulfils the Law and Prophets (Shabbath 31a) which is almost to what Jesus said years later.

As Karen Armstrong noted in *The First Christian* (page 30), "The more we read of the rabbis, the more we see that Jesus' teaching is for the most part well within the rabbinic traditions and not strikingly original. Like the Pharisees, he is insistent that 'Charity and deeds of loving kindness are equal to all the mitzvot in the Torah' (Tosefta Peah 4:19).

There is even a quote that seems to be from John 6 that has been found that says that unless one does not partake of my flesh and drink my blood so as to be one with me he will not be saved but which is actually from the Mithriac communion rite.

Jesus' teaching was stolen from other people. This Christian habit of borrowing and plagiarism explains a lot and prevents us from using seeming Gospel quotes in books to predate the gospels to these books. It makes it a bit more likely that Jesus was totally invented too. It is hard to see how the crowds could have been spellbound by Jesus, who taught differently from the scribes and Pharisees, as the gospel says when he only served up what was on the menu for the previous hundred years. They are keen to make him seem original because they claim he is the revelation of God and God would not come to reveal hackneyed old hat and aphorisms and would not be so trite.

PAPIAS

Papias, the Bishop of Hierapolis, who reigned when Hadrian was emperor of Rome which was from 117-138 AD is usually assumed to have given the first unmistakable evidences that the gospels existed or were circulated.

Papias speaks of a gospel written by Mark. But he complains that this gospel was dreadfully disorganised. It cannot be the Gospel of Mark that we have now he means, for it has been put together with sufficient skill.

Read what FF Bruce wrote about him. He wrote that Papias “preferred oral tradition to written records. ‘I did not suppose,’ said Papias, ‘that what I could get from the books would help me so much as what I could get from a living a abiding voice’” (page 119). In 125 AD, Papias said that he preferred oral tradition to books for it informed better. There could be no clearer indication that he did not have the complete gospels for they would be preferred to every other source by anyone claiming to be Christian. Who could deny that books are better and more reliable than oral stories? Only those who can’t find any coherent and credible books! What the apostles wrote was more important than what the Church taught for the apostles being commissioned by Christ to teach his message were more reliable. Papias is evidence that the Church had no gospels written by the apostles.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

If the gospel of Luke was hidden then so was its sequel the book of Acts. Richard Carrier tells us, “Regardless of when Acts was written, it was not circulated to any notable degree until the mid-second century.” FF Bruce said that it is only after that time that the circulation of Acts is “amply attested.” Ben Witherington thought that the “manuscript had to be kept secret for a considerable period of time” in page 63 of his book *The Acts of the Apostles* (1998). The secrecy is interesting for there is no evidence at all that anybody did any fact checking about Jesus or his resurrection. Acts shows how the apostles (see Acts 2 where Peter uses only religious arguments and no evidence based ones and Acts 28 – where Paul when arguing for Jesus’ resurrection gives only evidence from prophecies and nothing else and thus proves that people were converting the faith without regard for evidence or facts).

Acts is in fact more important than the gospels. Why? Because it tells us what the apostles who witnessed the resurrection thought of it and why it is true. The gospels never say that the apostles were that convinced or for long. It talks about the resurrection from an outsider point of view. Acts does not. A testimony about a witness is nothing compared to one from a witness. No Christian wants to depend on Acts alone for Acts is alone!! There is no corroboration for its claims.

CONCLUSION

There is no evidence at all that the Gospels were published within one hundred years after Jesus’ demise. Regarding that period it is no wonder that Robin Lane Fox described it as extremely difficult to figure out when the gospels were first quoted (page 124, *The Unauthorized Version*). There is no evidence that they were published for a long time after the end of the first century. Even if they were published they were not widely known or made important and even the highest people in the Church did not know of them. The words of Jesus were published before the acts of Jesus. Anybody could make up the words but the acts would be more difficult if the person did not exist or if a lot of lies were told about him. But if you make up the teachings first and get people to want to believe in the existence of the man who allegedly taught them it is easier to add in the alleged deeds later. The words differ from the gospels enough to indicate that the gospels were still evolving or were secret. These facts utterly destroy the credibility of Christianity for the secrecy speaks of having something to hide. For all we know, maybe there never was a Jesus.