

THE PASSOVER PLOT

The Passover Plot by Hugh Schonfield sold over three million copies. What I don't like in this book, is how it is an interpretation of what might have happened to Jesus that occasionally rests on the gospel evidence and then on conjecture. If you wish to get rid of Christianity, it is better to just treat the gospels as if they are telling the truth and base a heretical interpretation on this basis alone. That would show that the gospels are not evidence for any supernatural event surrounding Christ. If they fail to verify the resurrection and they do fail dismally, then their other supernatural claims are dubious for they are lesser claims and the resurrection was what Jesus is supposed to be all about.

The book says that Jesus was completely sincere for there is no indication of duplicity in him (48). That is disproved by the answer he gave to the Jews who surmised that he was casting out devils by Satan for a mysterious purpose – he replied that Satan would not do that. Of course he would. Besides, possessing people doesn't do Satan much good. He would be better expending his energy putting bad suggestions into people's heads.

No evidence is granted for the assumption that Jesus was not born of a virgin (58) even though Schonfield said he would make it clear when he was into speculation (16).

He says that the more hostile Jews would not have sought for Jesus to be executed but for him to be locked up like the Baptist had been (98). Then, why did they not do so especially if the assertion that only a few took Jesus seriously though many liked to listen to him (98) is true? And why didn't they do this at the start of his ministry? The gospels say that things had turned sour between Jesus and the Jewish leaders at the start.

He takes it for granted that the story in John of Christ raising Lazarus from the dead was imagined because of the parable Luke of the rich man and Lazarus which he assumes to be a memory of Lazarus seeming to come back to life (132). First, the two names being the same is not evidence for this and second, Luke never said that Jesus raised a Lazarus. That is too much.

He says the council had to be careful with how it treated Jesus in case they would cause an uprising (141). They would have dealt with him secretly if they had. And if Pilate thought that their bringing Jesus to him was a trap meant for him like the book surmises (141) he would not have tried Jesus nor would they have brought Jesus to Pilate for they would never have gotten away with a scam like that.

Would the man who allegedly drugged Jesus really have allowed himself to have been spotted at the tomb? (page 200).

The good points of the book are these.

Schonfield admits that the destruction of Jerusalem and the Holy Land that took place when the Jews revolted against Rome in 66 AD saw to it that documentation and memory could not be used anymore to support the Jesus story (15). It is good that he says that the Jews believing that the time predicted by the prophet Daniel for the coming of the Messiah had caused tremendous messianic excitement in the time of Christ (26). This would have affected their critical faculties. They desperately wanted deliverance from the cruel Romans who once crucified two thousand at Jerusalem (36). They could have fell for a completely imaginary or reasonably careful fraudulent Messiah. Daniel 7 was likewise taken by them to speak of the Messiah coming to destroy Rome the evil empire. Josephus said that the scriptures inspired tremendous messianic fervour (219).

It is good of him to point out that there was no obvious importance in the name of Jesus or Joshua which was given to Mary's baby because it was a common name (60). And he speaks of the Genesis Apocryphon from the Dead Sea Scrolls which said that Lamech suspected that his wife had been impregnated by an angel. And that when Abraham was born a great star came up in the east. King Nimrod wanted to kill the child so his mother fled with him in secret. These legends could have inspired the gospel stories.

Since the times given in John conflict with the other gospels it is argued that John was going by the Roman way of reckoning time. Thankfully, the book says that it is very unlikely that Pilate would have had to try Jesus in the middle of night before it was morning (148).

It does not bother Schonfield to suggest that Jesus might have known about Judas pilfering from the apostles' common purse which strains his argument that Jesus was a genuine and honest person (155).

Page 160 contends that there were fourteen, not thirteen at the last supper – the beloved disciple spoken of only in John

making up the fourteenth person. But John never says that this man is not one of the twelve.

The gospel of Mark states that a young man was found semi-naked with Jesus in the garden where Jesus was arrested. If the young man mentioned in Mark really had been in the garden when Jesus was apprehended in order to warn him like the books says he might have been (166) he would not have been there when the band arrived. The young man was possibly invented by libertine Christianity which may have thought Jesus had been having gay sex that night. It is hard to see any other reason why he would have been with Jesus in a state of near undress.

Would Pilate really have been scared to execute a man without evidence in case the emperor would hear of it? (175). He allegedly did just that. Pilate was notorious for mass murders of innocent people.

Page 180, we read that the Jewish leaders would not have come to attend the execution of Jesus for they would have been to blame for it. The synoptic gospels – the first three gospels – say they were. It is certainly true that if the gospels were right to blame these leaders they would not have been present.

Pilate and Joseph of Arimathea could have urged discretion about what was done to the corpse of Jesus (191). The gospels never say that they failed to be discreet which is important for possibly explaining why the body vanished for it was never buried.

Joseph asked for the soma, the body of Jesus and Pilate tells him he can have the ptoma, the corpse (192). Did Joseph believe that Jesus was not dead? When Joseph asks for Jesus as if he were not dead or necessarily dead and Pilate answers him using a word for Jesus indicating that he thought or pretended to think he really was dead what can we think?

Christians will object that Joseph would hardly ask Pilate for the living body of Jesus for he wouldn't have wanted Pilate to think Jesus was alive. The answer is perhaps that the gospel was in Greek – a different language to that used by these men. So Pilate might not have noticed what Joseph meant. The Gospel is saying that that though Joseph asked for body he meant a living one and this meaning was not put across to Pilate who interpreted body as meaning corpse.

The way the story of the stabbing of Jesus with a lance (193) is told shows that it was not believed so the gopeller has to say he saw it. So many testimonies stood against that one in John. He was lying for he did not even give his name and anonymous testimonies are as useless as anonymous letters. If he cared about Jesus he would have went to some safe place for he travelled enough and so he could have been able to put his name on the gospel. He gave the impression as well that the witness wasn't himself. Why write, "A witness saw this", instead of, "I saw this"? Why turn a piece of evidence into hearsay – hearsay is no good? If he had been claiming to have seen it himself then he was a liar.

He says the women did not expect a resurrection when they came to anoint him (193). They were not reliable witnesses to the resurrection when they refused to believe that Jesus would rise as he said he would accusing him of being a false prophet if he was a true prophet.

Page 198 says something very important, Isaiah 53, which Christ thought was written about him says that the servant was buried with the wicked and buried with the wealthy in his DEATHS. This infers that he servant was to die at least twice, he was going to survive the first death – which was probably a coma or something and many did think you were dead when in a coma. Jesus could have schemed to die a fake death over this prophecy.

It is significant that we read that bodies could have been stolen for magical purposes regardless of the penalty of death that hung over such actions (198).

It is noticed that the stories of the appearances of Jesus are so vague that they could even withstand a spiritualist interpretation (205).

A contradiction is seen between the disciples not being sure that Jesus rose when they saw him in Galilee in Matthew and the account that they met him for the first time in Jerusalem the day he rose (203). Had Jesus appeared in Galilee to the disciples they would have been sure it was him because they would have seen him before leaving Jerusalem.

The historian Josephus who lived through it all estimated that in the siege of Jerusalem which happened after Jesus resulted in one million one hundred thousand deaths (219). One reason the number was that enormous was that loads of pilgrims had come to worship in the holy city (220). Christianity was headquartered in Jerusalem. The Jews were wiped out in Caesarea (221 or Josephus, Jewish Wars II, 18:49, 29:1). Galilee was covered in corpses and many were enslaved (221 or Josephus, Jewish Wars III, 4:1, 10:9). These were Jesus' haunts. Now for an important quotation: "If Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and therefore before A.D. 37, very few who had seen and heard him can have been alive forty years later" (221). These people wouldn't have had the importance and power to be able to write an exposure of Christians lies that could become big enough to strike it in dangers blow. And people had more important things to think about than religious disputes. The Christians would have left through persecution and we know through Eusebius there were not many

of them in the Holy Land so who is going to worry about a sect that was no threat to the Jews?

If Mark was composed in Italy, Matthew in Egypt, Luke in Greece and John in Asia Minor (282) it only makes the situation worse for the gospels were written far away from the people who might have known Jesus.

The Testimony Book, an early book about the teaching of Christ was supposed to have been out by 50 AD and have been a short scroll that was easy to copy (266). The fact is there is no evidence of its existence. There is no reason why Matthew, Mark and Luke could not have invented the teachings of Jesus. The hypothesis of an older book is based on the syntax used but that would only mean they plagiarised something which might have had nothing to do with Jesus at all.

It is more likely that the Church at that time scorned books except the Old Testament in case they would stifle the living word of the Spirit – the Church was thoroughly Pentecostal. Why else would the body of the first Christian writings be so small barring the possibility that the Church burned them later for they were unfavourable to its agenda?

Papias was said to have said that Matthew put the oracles written in Hebrew together. This is assumed to refer to his gospel. But the book says that oracles or logia refer to the Old Testament prophecies of Jesus (267). So Papias then did not know Matthew's gospel but only Matthew's compilation of the Old Testament texts that allegedly taught the gospel.

Schonfield assumes that when Jewish tradition says that Jesus had five disciples, Matthai, Naki, Netsar, Buni and Todah that it means the five authors of the first Jesus books (270). But that interpretation is not likely or necessary. Why say the disciples when you mean authors?

Page 299, Pilate lost his job in 36 or early 37 AD. He had to answer for accusations made by the Jews and the Samaritans. Caiaphas lost his as well at the Passover time in 37. Jesus could not have possibly been killed later than Passover of the year 36.

In 62 AD, the high priest was defrocked and replaced for committing illegal acts to get rid of James, Jesus' brother including convening an illegal council (299). If this had happened with Jesus as the gospels say then why didn't the high priest get into bother then? Christians answer problems like this with a whole pile of ifs and maybes and have solutions that are more complicated than non-religious ones. They offend the law of economy that the likeliest thing is the simplest.

CONCLUSION:

The gospels show that Jesus did try to use fake wonders to get popularity. Schonfield's Jesus tries to fake a resurrection but dies despite his efforts.

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