

Paul denies Jesus lived recently

Many have noted how the writings of the apostle Paul, the first Christian writings, give no indication that Jesus's life and death happened recently. Others think that there are hints that Jesus was believed to be an obscure figure who lived centuries before. Where is the truth?

NO FIRST CENTURY CHRIST

The writings of Paul, the first Christian writer deny the view expressed in the gospels that Jesus lived roughly from about 4BC to 33 or whatever AD and don't even say he lived and died on earth - he could have died in some arcane and magical world. He says that Jesus died and rose from the dead on the third day and then he appeared. But he could have risen the third day centuries before and started only to appear in the early thirties AD. Theodore Parker noticed from the New Testament that Paul's Jesus was a mythological figure (page 234, Theodore Parker's Discourses). Paul does state some things about Jesus' life but he never puts Jesus in any time or place or says that what he knows about Jesus came from historical data. It might have been worked out from Old Testament prophecies or have been disclosed to somebody in visions. There is no evidence against the view from Paul himself that the only revelation Paul got was a sense that God was telling him to interpret the alleged messianic prophecies of scripture as having been fulfilled by an unknown man and that this was the cause of his conversion and he thought the man appeared to him later (page 15, Jesus - One Hundred Years Before Christ). No hint is given that the vision had anything to do with his conversion or that it was even as important as scripture.

The Epistles of Paul just say that Jesus was born of woman, lived under the law of Moses, was betrayed, said, "This is my body given for you", over bread, testified to the faith before Pontius Pilate - did Pilate have a vision of Jesus (Paganism used techniques to induce "visions") or did he see the real Jesus or did he just hear what Jesus supposedly said through some prophet? (Note: the letter that records this, the first epistle to Timothy, is regarded as a late forgery by most scholars) Jesus died on a cross, rose to life and appeared in his time. Paul's Jesus could have been born of this woman on another world. The Law of Moses was believed to be a Law that was always in force - because it was really God's Law - but which was only revealed at the time of Moses so Jesus could have been born under the Law before Moses was even born.

Romans 9:5 says that the Jews are descended from the patriarchs and that Christ came from their flesh and blood which seems to contradict the view that Jesus never lived on earth. But God could have taken an embryo to Heaven so that the Christ would be Jewish or made sperm into a body for Jesus in Heaven just like he made Eve from Adam's rib. Perhaps despite being risen for countless centuries, the risen Jesus had his bodily nature changed after the Israelites came to be so that he was genetically a descendant. Or perhaps because when Paul decreed that Onesimus and Philemon were blood brothers though they were not this is a reflection of that idea. Perhaps Jesus was only a legal descendant but not an actual one.

In the Bible, the angels are natural material beings like men and who have bodies but who possess unusual powers.

A major proof that the gospels tell nothing but lies is in Romans 13. It goes, "Let every person be loyal subject to the governing (civil) authorities. For there is no authority except from God. Therefore he who resists and sets himself up against the authorities resists what God has appointed and arranged. And those who resist will bring down judgment upon themselves. For civil authorities are not a terror to people of good conduct, but to those of bad behaviour. Would you have no dread of him who is in authority? Then do what is right and you will receive his approval and commendation. For he is God's servant for your good. One must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath and escape punishment, but also as a matter of principle and for the sake of conscience" (1-5).

This refers specifically to the corrupt, lying, thieving and brutal Roman empire. Paul would not have written this way had the gospels been telling the truth that Pilate, the Roman governor of Palestine, and the Roman Empire had put Jesus to death. Jesus and his apostles openly defied the authority of the Jewish leaders according to the gospels and they were by no means as despicable as the Romans. Jesus also defied Rome according to the gospels by claiming to be the Messiah, a political title meaning he was saying he was the true king of the Jews not the Emperor, and did what Messiahs do going into Jerusalem on a donkey to claim the city and accept the praises of the people. Jesus claiming to be the Son of God meant he was happy to make the Romans lose faith in their many gods which was also treasonous for the Romans believed that their future in power depended on their gods. Jesus encouraged people to hope the world would end soon which meant he wanted God to come and overthrow the Roman Empire and being in a Roman province that was treason and would rouse a smug attitude towards the Empire and make people less keen on living up to its demands. What this chapter from Romans tells us is that most of what is in the gospels isn't true. Paul commended the authorities despite their injustice. Despite what the hypocrite says, good people did have to fear the authorities. Had the authorities destroyed the good man Jesus he would

not have written this way. He says that his command to obey the authorities is just a good idea. He says it is a matter of conscience. If you disrupt the authorities then you are committing sin – its objectively wrong. He is saying that true Christians cannot break the law of Rome even though Jesus indicates the opposite in the gospels. It makes it more likely that when he said that the authorities or rulers slew Jesus that he did not mean political authorities but that Jesus was slain by supernatural beings who had no real authority though they just had powers. The Jesus of Paul and the primitive Church was not killed by the Romans. His crucifixion must have taken place in the distant past or in a celestial world for a more recent crucifixion would mean the Romans had to have been responsible.

Jesus broke Roman and religious law by wrecking the money changing area in the Temple. The fact that he got doing a lot of damage (Matthew 21:12; John 2:15) shows he got others to help him do this. You can't wreck a public area swarming with people without somebody stopping you immediately. When Jesus got as far as he did it shows he sought and got help. He organised a riot. Had this event really happened Paul would not have been able to write as he did for the gospels may have put in the story to explain why the Jews decided that they would wait no more but get Jesus despatched off to the next world as soon as they could. To deny the possible major cause of the crucifixion could be tantamount to denying that Jesus was crucified on earth at all. Mark 11:16 says Jesus stopped people from carrying vessels in the Temple which indicates that he had a huge pile of manpower, real mean fighting man-machines, which contradicts the fact that they did nothing later to help save him from his death a few days later.

That nobody mentioned the cleansing of the Temple outside the gospels shows that it never happened. Josephus writing a few decades later mentioned lesser events happening in the Temple but never mentioned this one. He didn't have to mention Jesus if he didn't want to but not mentioning that a riot took place surely shows it never happened. When such a plausible story is false we cannot trust the gospels at all.

Paul's emphasis on living in peace with everybody and even putting up with people who still had superstitious scruples despite being Christians does not fit a Jesus who uses violence, hate speech and gets others involved in them too. The gospel Jesus has been an encouragement to people who believe they have a right to send hate-mail to homosexuals or people of a despised religion and sneer at them on the street.

Paul's stress on faith would be incompatible with the traditional Christian idea of a Jesus who did lots of miracles on earth for Paul wanted a faith nourished by the word of God and not by miracles. He viewed faith as a great blessing and the means of salvation so though he considered visions tolerable too many miracles would be a problem and would block faith.

Romans 15:8 tells us that Christ became a servant to the circumcised, referring to the Jews, to show that God was truthful so that the promises made to the patriarchs centuries before would be confirmed. The promises didn't mention a saviour who would die for sins and rise again. They promised material blessings for Israel and peace with a David ruling it as its just king on earth. Unless you want to believe that Paul thought that Jesus did all this for Israel in some unrecorded time perhaps at least a century before his time you can see that Jesus did not fulfil any of these promises. The alternative is to hold that Paul is a liar or that Romans 15:8 tells us nothing about when Jesus lived for he could have been this servant, that proved these points, after his resurrection or even before his birth as a man. All of the three would indicate that Paul cannot be taken as evidence for the existence of Jesus. In the same chapter Paul called on the Romans to be tolerant with each other after the example of Jesus Christ. But the Gospel Jesus was very intolerant of the Jewish leaders and of hypocrites. He was tolerant of stubborn sinners but the intolerance is what shines through most.

Many think that Paul wrote that when he admitted to having persecuted the Church (Philippians 3:6) that the Church must have existed before him so he was not the inventor of Jesus or the first Christian. He only admits to his bloodthirsty past the once. He immediately added that he was above reproach when it came to justice as the Law of Moses understood it. He then says that he perceived all this as rubbish when the light of Christ shone upon him. The Church could have been just the chosen body that was conscious of garbled new revelation coming through and Paul was chosen as their prophet and seer. He could have been the one that shaped these revelations that became solidified into a new god, a resurrected Jesus Christ. He could still have been the creator of Jesus.

Paul said that Jesus died and rose according to the scriptures. The scripture he had in mind was probably Isaiah 53 which speaks of a man suffering for others as an offering for sin – one of Paul's major themes about Jesus - and then he gets his reward. It is the best candidate though it is bad enough. Romans 10:16 proves that it is the one. The suffering man is spoken of in the past tense in Isaiah as if it had all happened long ago. Christians say the prophets often predicted future events in the language of the past. Isaiah never did that even if others did so that is improbable. They would have made it obvious that they could not mean the past if they did. Also, the passage could be about the past so it should be taken to mean the past. 53:1 asks who has believed this message about the servant meaning nobody did. We gather then that that generation knew who or what it was about and did not believe it. It was too vague and obscure in itself to be really unbelievable to those who accepted prophets unless it was not vague and obscure to them indicating they knew what and who it referred to. Paul's use of the text may indicate that he believed that Jesus lived long ago. Paul said that Jesus was a mystery to the ages past but that could refer to the gospel of the resurrection which was only revealed in the latter days by the apparition of

Christ. The past tense in Isaiah shifts to the future tense when speaking of the rehabilitation and vindication of the servant indicating that the tenses should be taken literally.

Paul told the Thessalonians that they and he believed that Jesus died and rose again (1 Thessalonians 4:14). You don't say you believe that John F Kennedy died. You would only say that if you had just the word of a few witnesses for it that he died or if you knew people who thought they had seen his ghost that said he had died on a cross. If Jesus had died in the first century Paul would have written you know that Jesus died and believe that he rose again and not lumped the death and resurrection under belief. The context in which Paul said this was about that there was hope if loved ones die. Yet the hope he gives is one of belief not proof so there was no proof for proof would serve his consoling purpose better.

The mission fields that Paul worked in would have required him to be able to tell the people about Jesus' life and there were mystical heretics around who would have liked there to have been Christians who knew nothing much about the Jesus of history. Pagans comprised the bulk of the converts and pagans were heavily into stories about gods and they would not have changed the religious habits of a lifetime. If Jesus had had a story, Paul would have focused on it more. It would be different if Paul admitted that nobody knew anything about Jesus. A Jesus who could be known through visions would have been a big attraction to pagans. A Jesus with stories about him like the gods of the pagans would have been much better.

Paul complained about how hard it was to keep people true to the faith and yet he did not give them the whole verified Jesus story. He wrote to the Thessalonians that they must hold fast to the faith and prove all things in it (1 Thessalonians 5:21). This proof contained nothing then about the life of Jesus. Whatever had to be proven had to be proven by the Old Testament and without the life of Jesus. We see this when Paul complains about his fear that their faith was not firm despite his efforts which betrays a non-intellectual historical basis for that faith (chapter 3). In 2 Thessalonians the concern is that the people will be tricked by forged or altered letters from the apostles that contradict the apostolic doctrine of the second coming and what will happen. This could not happen if they were familiar with the Jesus of history, if that Jesus is the one of the gospels, for the second coming was one of Jesus' main themes and Jesus went on about it so much that it is clear that he may have thought of rising from the dead and the second coming happening then or that the second coming was not far behind.

Paul centred the Church not on the foundation of Jesus and his history but on Jesus as seen through the apostles and especially himself. This overwhelming dependence on the apostles proves that Jesus was at most a vision that they had and that the gospel history never happened.

Ephesians 4:8 says that Jesus took captives with him when he ascended into the heavens from earth. This proves that the author thought that Jesus must have ascended centuries before because nobody could say he did it some years ago. The saints are not captives. Paul says that Jesus does not drag people kicking and screaming into his friendship. The captives are his enemies who he takes up out of the world but not necessarily to Heaven.

Romans 16:25,26 speaks of the mystery of redemption which was recently unveiled and kept in secret for long ages but is now disclosed through the prophets and scriptures of the Old Testament. The mystery of redemption is very broad and covers the death and resurrection of Christ and the call to the world to be saved through this redemption. Paul is saying that the converts are seeing these doctrines in the Old Testament and the apostles never claimed authority for themselves but always used the Old Testament to support their claims so everything depended on the predictions of the Old Testament. Even Paul himself and the Early Church didn't believe that their mission was based on the miracles and life of Christ or any gospels. In fact the only thing that counted was the Old Testament prophecies. If it didn't predict the resurrection of Jesus then it never happened even if the whole of Palestine saw Jesus rise!

Paul said that the children of Israel hundreds of years before when Moses was alive drank from the spiritual rock that was Christ and that God was not pleased with any of them (1 Corinthians 10:4). He said that they were lost so he does not mean that they were spiritually sustained by grace but that Christ was there to teach them. Paul was frightened of people twisting his words (2 Thessalonians 2:2) so he wrote what he meant. And especially when he was writing to the Church in Corinth which had many people who believed Jesus was not a material being and that the resurrection was a symbol and not an event. Paul believed that Jesus only appeared to people for a good spiritual reason so he was not talking about apparitions. Jesus lived on earth as a man in the time of Moses. The fact that the deeds of Jesus are not mentioned in the books of Moses was of little consequence to him. The early Church believed the prophet Moses predicted who would be like him was Jesus. Paul knew that when Moses predicted the coming of a prophet like himself that this prophecy was too vague and therefore useless unless you assume that this prophet was alive then which narrows it down a good bit. All the early Christians believed this prophet was Jesus so Paul would have thought Jesus was alive in Moses' day.

Why does Paul when enumerating the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12) which are to prophesy, preach well, do miracles include the gift of faith? He says this gift is given to some in the Church.

Faith is necessary for membership in the Church and for being a Christian. But what is this faith that is given to some of

these? How is it different?

Now this faith is different from the faith you have to have when you join the Church. It is not normal Christian faith but something more advanced. It has to be when that faith is necessary for membership. Now both kinds of faith are based on evidence and are a gift from God – his guidance makes you see that the faith is true. Let's call the ordinary faith of Christians normal faith. Let's call the other charismatic faith. It is a charism – a gift that the Spirit doesn't give for everybody just like he doesn't give all the gift of prophecy.

So what is different about them? There is only one possible answer.

The normal faith of the Christians was based on the apostles' testimony and on the feeling that God was telling you in your heart that it was true but not on anything concretely evidential. But God was choosing some to receive and or provide proper evidence for the faith of and the existence of Jesus which was charismatic faith. That would only happen if there were no people who saw Jesus do miracles or who knew people who had experienced Jesus' miracles. It would only happen if there were no people who saw the death of Jesus happen. So God provided evidence for the chosen in the Church by giving them visions of what supposedly actually happened.

Paul counselled the Church members to work out their salvation by fear and trembling – Jesus never encouraged fear and often told his followers not to be afraid. When Paul wants the trembling it shows he wanted them to be very afraid. When the first Christian writer urges something that the gospels say Jesus didn't want then it follows that the gospels are lying. Maybe they are not, but we have to follow the rules of evidence which require us to pay most heed to the earliest testimony. And that testimony is Paul's.

Some say that Paul quoted the historical Jesus in his epistles. 1 Corinthians 9:14 superficially matches Matthew 10:10. 1 Corinthians 10:27 superficially matches Luke 10:7. Romans 13:7 superficially matches Mark 12:13-17; 1 Thessalonians 5:2-5 superficially matches Luke 12:39-40. All of the parallels can be explained without suggesting that they were quotes from the gospel version of Jesus. The gospels came after the epistles and so they probably took some inspiration from the epistles. Some parallels can also be explained as coincidence or are down to expressions like thief in the night which might have been current in the Church and were incorporated into the gospel version of the words of Jesus. The author of Luke was reputed to be a disciple of Paul. None of the verses are presented as quotations so they should not be taken to be quotations. The first selection has Jesus saying something we all say, without intending to quote him or anybody – there are certain things that tend to be expressed in the same words by coincidence – Jesus saying that the worker deserves his wage and Paul puts it like this, that those who preach the gospel should live by the gospel which is too different to be a possible quotation.

In a culture that was full of mythical gods that everybody made up stories about, it would be odd if Jesus were real and Paul would not make him evidence-based to "solidify" him against nebulous gods!