

DID JUSTIN HAVE FULL ACCESS TO GOSPELS?

Jesus Christ reputedly died and rose again in the thirties of the first century. A Christian, called Justin Martyr wrote in defence of the Christian religion in the century after. Justin's writings are used in defence of the Christian claim that Jesus really existed as the four gospels say.

Justin gives some details from the life of Christ that are similar to the Gospel of Matthew in the Dialogue with Trypho.

Trypho was an able Jewish opponent of Christian "truth" and as he asserted that there was no historical data about Jesus the scribes of Justin's writings added in gospel stories to make him look like a liar.

Justin's version of the visit of the magi says Jesus was born in a cave and that the magi came from Arabia and learned from the elders of the Jews that the messiah was to be born in Bethlehem and he says that Joseph was told to keep Mary as his wife for her unexpected pregnancy was down to God. And he speaks of the flight of the Joseph and Mary and baby Jesus to Egypt. He says like Matthew that the massacre of the Innocents by King Herod who wanted to find and kill the Christ child was prophesied by Jeremiah. The differences suggest that he was not using Matthew at all. It could well be that this book was a source for Matthew's gospel.

It is important that Justin is only close to the gospel story in its most dubious claims, the nativity, the entry into Jerusalem and the baptism in the Jordan. Even if he really wrote about these things he showed credulity and anyway he was writing too long after the events to be used as backup for the Christian story.

Justin did not know of the extremely basic apostolic and New Testament doctrine originated by Jesus that there was no salvation without explicit faith in Christ for he thought that Socrates and Heraclitus, pagan Greek philosophers, were redeemed in the blood of Christ and were in Heaven. Anything he says then is to be taken with a pinch of blessed salt unless it was something he would not have liked to admit.

In chapter 49, of his Dialogue, Justin gets Trypho to agree that the Old Testament says that Elijah will precede the Messiah. But the Old Testament says no such thing which is why the report of Trypho's agreement is dubious. This means that Justin's discourse that heavily borrows from the gospel about John being Elijah and Jesus saying so is an insertion. Now why try to get Trypho to believe things about John being Elijah when Trypho would not have believed Elijah had to proclaim a Jesus style Messiah? Was somebody trying to make it look like the gospels were known before they actually were? Evidence for this is Trypho's rejection of the doctrine that Isaiah saying one would come crying in the wilderness referred to the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus. Trypho would have believed Elijah if he was coming would literally come. It is no use pointing to an obscure prophet like John who wasn't regarded as being on the level of the other prophets and who produced no scriptures and saying he was Elijah. Anybody could be Elijah at that rate.

The discourse is followed by a report that Trypho learned from it that John is being said to have come with the same Holy Spirit as Elijah and he finds that silly. That is a lie and Justin knows it because the Jews had no problem with God invisibly indwelling more than one prophet at the one time never mind when there was centuries between them. Justin then quoted texts from the Old Testament to show that it was possible. Why did Trypho not ask Justin where he got his information that Jesus fulfilled the prophecies from? Why is he presented as taking for granted what Justin reports to him is right? Why does he listen to Justin saying about what happened to John the Baptist and that it fulfilled a prophecy and then change the subject to object that John and Elijah having the same Holy Spirit is silly? Trypho would have questioned the story he was being told not the theology. The bits that seem to have come from the gospels look so much like insertions made long after Justin died. A forger seems to have been at work.

If Justin had the Matthew or Luke gospel then why did he depend on Isaiah to prove that Jesus was virgin-born in chapter 66 when both he and Trypho knew that it was not good enough as Trypho stated?

The chapter that gives the details about Jesus' birth and the massacre of the innocents as Matthew has it is dubious for it is offered as proof that Jesus fulfilled prophecy and we are given the impression that Trypho accepted it for that is the end of the dispute. Trypho would not have been that easily convinced. Then it jumps to the declaration by Trypho that Justin's scripture interpretations are contrivances. His silence about the books that allegedly verify that they are not contrivances shows that somebody has been inserting the Matthew material into the passage.

The early Christians would have thought that kings from the east came to worship Jesus and that Jesus had been baptised by John who was Elijah without the gospels because they created the life story of Jesus out of the Bible prophecies and

John was a popular prophet. A lot of the material in Justin can be explained that way.

A scribe probably inserted the material that is close to the gospels. It was material that could have been left out and it is impossible to see what Justin wanted it for. And why didn't he use the story of the entry into Jerusalem when Trypho said nobody knew of this Jesus? Justin would have proven the gospels to be authentic historical documents before proving that Jesus was predicted in the Old Testament. That is the logical order and the order Trypho would have demanded for Trypho complained that the Christians were copying from pagan and Jewish religious ideas. He thought a lot of the Jesus stuff was stolen from the story of Perseus. That Justin omitted the logical order tells us a lot. It makes one think that Justin lost that debate if it happened. Perhaps Trypho was such an erudite and persuasive denier of the existence of Jesus that the Christians had to "improve" the Christian cause by altering Justin's writings to obliterate Trypho's success.

OTHER SNIPPETS ABOUT JUSTIN

We have some fragments from Justin's Work on the Resurrection. This book was written to answer those who rejected the idea that anybody could come back from the dead.

In the first chapter of that work he said that truth is free and is its own authority and should be believed both for its own status as truth and for the sake of trusting the God of truth who sends it. He said that the truth of Christianity is sent with authority and it is not right to ask for proof for it for the proof is greater than the proven and since God is truth nothing not even proof can be better than God.

In other words, you believe in Christianity because God says it is true and not because there is any evidence. So there cannot be any evidence when he has that attitude. When Justin answers objections to the resurrection he never does it by trying to verify that the apostles and the gospels were truthful so he never had any gospels - at least in full - and did not regard the apostles testimony as evidence. Rather than depend on evidence the Christian sees if the gospel might be true and then gets a revelation from God that it is true. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that faith is caused when God supernaturally helps you see that what he teaches is true.

It is certain that Justin did not have the gospels.

OBJECTION:

Now, there are certainly places in the Dialogue where Trypho voices objections which clearly envision an historical man whom Christians have turned into a divine Messiah. For example:

Chapter 67: "You Christians should be ashamed of yourselves, therefore, to repeat the same kind of stories as these men, and you should, on the contrary, acknowledge this Jesus to be a man of mere human origin."

Chapter 38: "For you utter many blasphemies, in that you seek to persuade us that this crucified man was with Moses and Aaron, and spoke to them in the pillar of the cloud; then that he became man, was crucified, and ascended up to heaven, and comes again to earth, and ought to be worshiped."

But the passage in chapter 8, quoted above, does not do the same, and we have to ask whether behind it might lie something which could encompass a denial of Jesus' historicity—even though Justin does not make use of it that way. The key phrase is, "you invent a Christ for yourselves" (Christon heautois tina anaplassete). This is broad and unspecific language. It could reflect a current accusation by some Jews that "You have invented your Messiah," lock, stock and humanity. If the phrase is taken by Justin from Jewish parlance of the day and referred to Jesus (Eddy and Boyd suggest that Trypho "is simply denying that Jesus is the Christ") one wonders why he could not have said that, why it would not have been more specific such as: "You have taken a (crucified) man and turned him into the Messiah." Instead, "invented a Messiah" could well convey that the Jesus of Nazareth which constitutes that Messiah has been invented. On what has this invention been based? On "accepting a false (foolish, unfounded) report" (mataian akoēn paradexamenoī). This may refer to whatever Gospels (those "memoirs of the apostles") Justin has knowledge of. But in being declared foolish and unfounded, this could encompass in Jewish opinion an accusation that they are completely false in regard to history and their Jesus character.

CONCLUSION

The evidence concerning Jesus in the Dialogue does not encourage belief in his being a historical reality. It does the opposite! It discourages it!

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