

THE HISTORICAL CASE FOR JESUS

In his 2007 book *THE CASE FOR THE REAL JESUS*, Lee Strobel, former legal editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, interviewed some of the most accomplished historians specializing in ancient texts. The case was made without a single mention of the Shroud of Turin or the Sudarium.

“In recent years, six major challenges to the traditional view of Jesus have emerged... They are among the most powerful and prevalent objections to creedal Christianity that are currently circulating in popular culture.” (Page 14)

After grilling the experts, he summarized his findings on pages 266 and 267:

- “*Are scholars discovering a radically different Jesus in ancient documents just as credible as the four gospels?* No, the alternative texts that are touted in liberal circles are too late to be historically credible – for instance, the Gospel of Thomas was written after AD 175 and probably closer to 200. According to eminent New Testament scholar I. Howard Marshall of the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, the Thomas gospel has ‘no significant new light to shed on the historical Jesus.’ The Secret Gospel of Mark, with its homoerotic undercurrents, turned out to be an embarrassing hoax that fooled many liberal scholars too eager to buy into bizarre theories about Jesus, while no serious historians give credence to the so-called Jesus Papers. The Gnostic depiction of Jesus as a revealer of hidden knowledge – including the teaching that we all possess the divine light that he embodied – lacks any connection to the historical Jesus.
- *Is the Bible’s portrait of Jesus unreliable because of mistakes or deliberate changes by scribes through the centuries?* No, there are no new disclosures that have cast any doubt on the essential reliability of the New Testament. Only about one percent of the manuscript variants affect the meaning of the text to any degree, and not a single cardinal doctrine is at stake. Actually, the unrivaled wealth of New Testament manuscripts greatly enhances the credibility of the Bible’s portrayal of Jesus.
- *Have new explanations refuted Jesus’ resurrection?* No, the truth is that a persuasive case for Jesus rising from the dead can be made by using five facts that are well-evidenced and which the vast majority of today’s scholars on the subject – including skeptical ones – accept as true: Jesus’ death by crucifixion; his disciples’ belief that he rose and appeared to them; the conversion of the church persecutor Paul; the conversion of the skeptic James, who was Jesus’

half-brother; and Jesus' empty tomb. All the attempts by skeptics and Muslims to put Jesus back into his tomb utterly fail when subjected to serious analysis, while the overblown and ill-supported claims of the Jesus Tomb documentary and book have been decimated by knowledgeable scholars.

- *Were Christian beliefs about Jesus stolen from pagan religions?* No, they clearly were not. Allegations that the virgin birth, the resurrection, communion, and baptism came from earlier mythology simply evaporated when the shoddy scholarship of 'copycat' theorists was exposed. There are simply no examples of dying and rising gods that preceded Christianity and which have meaningful parallels to Jesus' resurrection. In short, this is a theory that careful scholars discredited decades ago.
- *Was Jesus an imposter who failed to fulfill the messianic prophecies?* On the contrary, a compelling case can be made that Jesus – and Jesus alone – matches the 'fingerprint' of the Messiah. Only Jesus managed to fulfill the prophecies that needed to come to fruition prior to the fall of the Jewish temple in AD 70. Consequently, if Jesus isn't the predicted Messiah, then there will never be one. What's more, Jesus' fulfillment of these prophecies against all odds makes it rational to conclude that he will fulfill the final ones when the time is right.
- *Should people be free to pick and choose what they want to believe about Jesus?* Obviously, we have the freedom to believe anything we want. But just because the U.S. Constitution provides equal protection for all religions doesn't mean that all beliefs are equally true. Whatever we believe about Jesus cannot change the reality of who he clearly established himself to be: the unique Son of God. So why cobble together our own make-believe Jesus to try to fulfill our personal prejudices when we can meet and experience the actual Jesus of history and faith?"

Anyone with doubts about these issues would do well to read all of this excellent book.

2012

www.newgeology.us/presentation24.html

John Michael Fischer