

WANTED: DEAD (BUT PREFERABLY) ALIVE

Rev. Charles St-Onge, April 21, 2004

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Introduction

Antiquities of Josephus:

At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus, and his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon their loyalty to him. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive. Accordingly they believed that he was the Messiah, concerning whom the Prophets have recounted wonders.¹

The *Talmud*, an arrest warrant for Jesus:

They hanged Yeshu on the Sabbath of the Passover. But for forty days before that a herald went in front of him (crying), "Yeshu is to be stoned because he practiced sorcery and seduced Israel and lead them away from God. Anyone who can provide evidence on his behalf should come forward to defend him." When, however, nothing favorable about him was found, he was hanged on the Sabbath of the Passover.²

I. Reliability of Other New Testament Documents

Reliability of Acts: Internal Evidence

- Pronouns change to the first person plural "we"
- No mention of the Fall of Jerusalem
- No mention of the death of James, the bishop of Jerusalem
- The book's sudden ending

Reliability of Acts: External Evidence

- Location of Lystra and Derbe is accurate (Acts 14:6)
- Title of Proconsul Gallio of Achaia correct (Acts 18:12)

Reliability of 1 Corinthians: Internal Evidence

- Almost no debate about its date, 55 AD
- Its 15th chapter deals with the resurrection

II. Reliability of the Gospels

- Archaeological evidence: A piece of scroll containing John's Gospel was found in Egypt dating to around 100 AD. A fragment of Mark's Gospel was discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls that can be dated to around 50 AD. Fragments of other gospels have been found that date them reliably to 60-70 AD.³
- Manuscript evidence: more abundant than any other ancient manuscripts, by *far*.

¹ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:63-64.

² *Babylonian Talmud*, 43a, http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~hummm/Topics/JewishJesus/b_san43a.html, April 19, 2004.

³ Geisler, 530.



Above: Pilate Inscription

Census fragments:

To Ptolemais, village secretary...from Horos, the son of Horos, the son of Horos, his mother being Herieus, of the aforesaid village of Bacchias...I register myself and those of my household for the house-by-house census of the past second year of Hadrian Caesar our Lord.” (119 AD census)

Gaius Vibius Maximus, prefect of Egypt, says: the house to house census having started, it is essential that all persons who for any reason whatsoever are absent from their homes be summoned to return to their own hearths, in order that they may perform the customary business of registration. (104 AD Census Edict) ⁴

III. The Resurrection Accounts

- There was a tomb for Jesus’ body
- Women went early Sunday morning to embalm the body
- When they got there, the body was gone
- Strange men or angels told them Jesus had risen
- Later, a risen Jesus appeared to them

The Insistence on Eyewitnesses

He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (1 Cor. 15:4-8)

We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. (2 Peter 1:16)

Alternate Beliefs

Hallucination?

Hallucinations are individual occurrences. By their very nature only one person can see a given hallucination at a time. They certainly aren’t something which can be seen by a group of people.⁵

Swoon? No Roman soldier would have left someone half-dead on the cross.

Whatever happened, it was enough to give panicked disciples the courage to risk their life in spreading the message about Jesus. It was enough to convert Saul, a hardened anti-Christian, and make him into Paul, one of the greatest Christian missionaries ever. Whatever happened, it made Jesus unique among the hundreds of Jews of his time who claimed to be the Messiah: it gave rise to a movement that exists to this day.

⁴ Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1991), 4.

⁵ Strobel, 238.