

2021 International eConference on the



# HISTORICAL JESUS

Saturday & Sunday  
**JULY 24-25**

Virtual  
Academic  
Conference



ATTEND FROM THE COMFORT AND  
SAFETY OF YOUR OWN HOME.

Come Hear the

**World's Leading Experts**  
on Historical Jesus Research

VISIT [GCRR.ORG](http://GCRR.ORG) FOR MORE DETAILS



GLOBAL  
CENTER *for*  
RELIGIOUS  
RESEARCH  
ACADEMIC INSTITUTE



# Christianity kicked off in AD70

Virtual Conference Presentation

July 24-25, 2021

<SLIDE 1>

## **TITLE**

In this presentation I will show that it is altogether reasonable to conclude that the religion of Christianity arose in the year 70 or shortly thereafter.

We will be looking at numerous strands of ancient evidence and take advantage of arguments from analogy by examining the history of other more modern religions.

<SLIDE 2>

## **—My Methodology**

There is a tendency for scholars to focus minutely on the Biblical and extra Biblical texts and this, in my opinion is a mistake. Let us include *philosophy*, that is, to help us know what is and what is not, a good argument, and *sociology*. Sociology will give us insights into what makes religions "kick off," what factors are necessary and whether those factors were present in AD70.

<SLIDE 3>

—**How to tackle the problem**

The fundamental mistake many scholars make is to tackle the problem head on.

Arguments about Jesus' historicity usually end up in a polemical quagmire because it is notoriously difficult to prove a negative, that is that Jesus as some kind of misunderstood sage never existed as a figure in history.

**Not HOW but WHEN did the religion arise**, is the best way forward.

<SLIDE 4>

—**What do we know?**

**Two things.**

**Firstly, a new religion arose in the first century.**

<SLIDE 5>

**Pliny the Younger** is the earliest non-Christian documentary evidence. Shortly after his appointment as governor of Bithynia (modern North-West Turkey) Pliny sought the

advice of the emperor Trajan on how to deal with the adherents of a new religious sect who called themselves Christians, and who had been brought to his attention as engaging in criminal activities.

<SLIDE 6>

**I have never attended hearings concerning Christians, so I am unaware what is usually punished or investigated, and to what extent.**

**I am more than a little in doubt whether there is to be a distinction between ages, and to what extent the young should be treated no differently from the more hardened; whether pardon should be granted to repentance;...**

<SLIDE 7>

**...whether the person who has been a Christian in some sense should not benefit by having renounced it; whether it is the name Christian, itself untainted with crimes, or the crimes which cling to the name which should be punished.**

Pliny then goes on to describe the results of his research into their beliefs and practices, and after interrogating two female slaves under torture, concludes that,

<SLIDE 8>

**... all I could discover was evidence of an absurd and extravagant superstition.**

We note that at the date of this letter Christians *were already being tried by the Roman authorities.*

Pliny mentions Christian apostates who stated that they had abandoned the new religion 20 years previously. As Pliny's letter is dated around 110 CE, this provides evidence for the existence of Christians around 90 CE, that is during the reign of Domitian.

<SLIDE 9>

**—Is there any other firmly datable evidence?** Yes, there is.

<SLIDE 10>

Some graffiti found in **Pompeii** suggests the religion had found its way to the Italian peninsula before the year 79 –the year of the eruption of Vesuvius. In the town of **Herculaneum**, which was also destroyed in 79, a chamber was uncovered in the 1930's which revealed on one wall a square covered with plaster. In it was deeply engraved the sign of a Latin cross, which had been violently torn out of its place just before the destruction of the site.

This is the earliest non-documentary evidence of the existence of Christianity.

<SLIDE 11>

—But how much earlier did the religion arise?

If the religion had arisen in the thirties which is the standard thesis, we would surely have some evidence of this in the writings of contemporaries; historians, common people, anybody – but there is nothing – only second century Christian forgeries such as the letters of Pilate and the supposed correspondence between Paul and Seneca. The most famous forgery is the so-called *Testimonium Flavianum* which is a Christian interpolation into a work of the Jewish historian Josephus.

The most noteworthy absences are in the works of **Josephus, Philo of Alexandria,** and the philosopher **Seneca** in Rome.

<SLIDE 12>

The scrolls discovered in the last century near the Dead Sea make no mention of Jesus or Christians.

There is just nothing there, in the contemporary records.

And despite exhaustive archaeological effort no monuments or artefacts have been found which can establish that Christians existed prior to AD70.

The usual explanation given by apologists is that the religion gained acceptance very slowly and went unnoticed for some forty years. But this goes against

everything written in the accepted record of the early church, the Acts of the Apostles which has Paul and Peter making great waves in Judea and Asia with the common folk and the Jewish and Roman hierarchy. Josephus, our best source, despite being well connected to the authorities, including the Jewish king Agrippa and being friend of the emperor knows nothing of this missionary effort.

<SLIDE 13>

The persecution of Christians by Nero after the great fire of Rome in 64 as described by Tacitus has been soundly debunked by scholars such as Shaw. Oddly, the Acts of the Apostles omits this momentous event as it does the deaths of Peter and Paul despite being written well after the events it pretends to report.

<SLIDE 14>

So, to recap, what do we know? Two things. Firstly, a new religion arose in the first century and it seems late in the first century.

The second point to note and which may seem obvious is that **the religion came out of Judaism.**

How do we know the religion came out of Judaism? We have Paul's letters.

We also have a fragment probably from Tacitus and quoted by Sulpicius Severus which says in part,

<SLIDE 15>

. . . the religion of the Jews and the Christians . . . although hostile to each other, nevertheless *sprang from the same sources; the Christians had grown out of the Jews:*

<SLIDE 16>

—But when exactly did the religion arise?

We have already seen from the evidence presented so far that the inception of the religion in the first part of the first century is not supported.

**Can we date the inception of the religion from Paul's letters?**

**No, these letters (in the form we have them) are undated.**

[But note that there is a reference to Aretas of Nabatea in 2 Corinthians 6, which I think can be shown to be an interpolation.]

Another way to approach this problem is by looking at **the theology of the early Christians.**

The apostle Paul says that God put forward Jesus as **a sacrifice of atonement**. Paul says this in Romans chapter 3. What does Paul mean by this?

The atonement festival, known as *Yom Kippur* in Hebrew, was held every year in Jerusalem. It was a very important festival which ***cleansed the Jews from their sins***. And it was instituted according to the Jewish scriptures as **a statute forever**. (See Leviticus 16:30-31)

<SLIDE 17>

Note that the Temple was captured and destroyed in the year 70. From the specific months given in the records the last official atonement ritual appears to have been performed in the year 69.

For highly religious people like the Jews, being made right with God was very important. How could the Jewish people become righteous before God without the annual ritual? Did something else replace the ritual? What did it mean theologically?

We know from Galatians that the first Christians were Jews. We would expect therefore to find Jewish references to the ancient ritual in the gospel which is the most Jewish, which is Matthew, and indeed we do find those references.

The story of the crucifixion in Matthew contains many allusions to the ancient ritual, including the insertion into the story of the character of Barabbas who stands for the scapegoat in the ancient ritual.

These parallels were recognised in ancient times and are discussed in the ancient text called the Letter of Barnabas.

The idea of the sacrifice of a man replacing the sacrifice of a goat in the atonement ritual *could have arisen prior to AD70* but surely that as a religious belief *could not have gained much currency* while the ancient tradition was still being performed.

(For a full discussion of this see Chapter 11 of my book *On Christian Origins*)

<SLIDE 18>

—**What are the key findings from sociology?**

Firstly, **successful religions bolt from the starting blocks**. As an example, consider Mormonism. Mormonism exploded after the publication of Joseph Smith's pseudo-history in 1830.

What do we find in the ancient writings regarding this? Did Christianity bolt or did it linger?

<SLIDE 19>

In Pliny, writing in 110AD, we have,

**The infection of this superstition has extended not merely through the cities, but also through the villages and country areas,...**

Near the end of his career Paul boasts,

<SLIDE 20>

**. . . by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ.**

(Romans 15:18-19)

Although I am reluctant to quote from that dubious text called the Acts of the Apostles, it may contain some true elements, among them being a record of the initial success of the religion.

**"And a great many people were brought to the Lord." (11:24)**

There are many references to the success of Christianity in Acts.

<SLIDE 21>

From sociology we gather that, successful religions bolt from the starting blocks. We also learn that **religions almost invariably *back date their myths of origin***. Once again, consider **Mormonism**. The Book of Mormon is a fictional account which attempts to establish a myth of origins for the religion in a pre-colonial America. Consider **20th century Pacific cults**, such as the Pomio Kivung of New Guinea or the John Frum cult of Vanuatu which I describe in my book. And when we examine Christianity, we see the same process in play.

**Adding antiquity** adds authority to religions. We see this is the main argument for Judaism in Josephus, *Against Apion*.

The fact that Christianity's myth of origins is clearly set by the gospels (but NOT Paul's letters) in the first half of the first century **almost guarantees that it actually started later**. If we push this to the extreme, we come up against Pliny's letter which almost certainly places the religion as existing at the end of the century (around the year 90).

<SLIDE 22>

Paul in 1 Corinthians, takes the origin of Christianity back to the time of **Moses**.

In Galatians chapter 3, he goes back even further, and links Christianity to that ancient doyen of Judaism, the legendary figure of **Abraham**.

The genealogy in the gospel of Luke links Jesus to the first man **Adam**.

So, we can reasonably suspect that the myth of origins put forward in the gospels, that is that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate about the year 30 is most likely *a back dated story*. This combined with *the silence of contemporary writers* from the first century should give us a high degree of confidence that this is indeed what happened. Hence the conclusion that appeals strongly to me is that the gospel stories were created at about the same time as the religion arose, that is near the end of the century.

Successful religions, of which Christianity is a prime example, bolt from the starting blocks, and they back date their myths of origin. Successful religions do not linger for forty or fifty years before becoming popular. In other words, there was *no hiatus in the case of Christianity*. The religion bolted like all other successful

religions do. *But when did it bolt?* We need look no further than the Jewish religious cataclysm of AD70.

<SLIDE 23>

—**What happened in AD70?**

Let us look in some detail at what happened in AD70.

Firstly, we know that **Messianic expectations were high at that time.**

<SLIDE 24>

The Roman historian Suetonius says,

**A firm persuasion had long prevailed through all the East, that it was fated for the empire of the world, at that time, to devolve on some who should go forth from Judea. This prediction referred to a Roman emperor, as the event shewed; but the Jews, applying it to themselves, broke out into rebellion.<sup>1</sup>**

<SLIDE 25>

---

<sup>1</sup> Suetonius, *Vespasian*

And secondly, we know from Josephus and Tacitus that in AD70 the religion of **Temple Judaism was crushed.**

Not only was the Temple destroyed but also all the officiating priests were killed by order of Titus.

<SLIDE 26>

—How did Christianity arise?

**The Messiah**

An actual Messiah (that is, the Christ, the *anointed one*) predicted in the Jewish holy writings did not come.

The prophecy in Isaiah:

<SLIDE 27>

**For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

Isaiah 9:6

The Roman poet Virgil in his Fourth Eclogue (c. 40 BCE) has the Cumaean Sibyl predict the coming of a saviour.

<SLIDE 28>

**Now is come the last age of the Cumaean prophecy:  
The great cycle of periods is born anew.  
Now returns the Maid, returns the reign of Saturn:  
Now from high heaven a new generation comes down.  
Yet do thou at that boy's birth,  
In whom the iron race shall begin to cease,  
And the golden to arise over all the world . . .**

An interesting question is whether Virgil knew of the Jewish prophecy.

In Matthew it is asserted many times that the one who came, that is Jesus, was the Messiah. There is Peter's confession for example, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16)

<SLIDE 29>

It was believed that the Messiah would set up a kingdom and reign.

<SLIDE 30>

**So when they had come together, they [the disciples] asked him,  
“Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?”**

(Acts 1:6)

**“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and  
of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.”**

(Revelation 11)

<SLIDE 31>

**They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the  
covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to  
them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh,  
comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever.**

(Romans 9:4-5)

But in AD70 the Messiah did NOT come, the longed-for kingdom was not set up.  
So naturally the question would have arisen: Perhaps the Messiah, the Saviour  
came in another form? The scriptures are the Word of God, and God cannot lie.  
Yes, they argued, *the Messiah did come*, but in a form we did not expect.

What does Paul say?

<SLIDE 32>

**Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,**

**who, though he was in the form of God,**

**did not regard equality with God**

**as something to be exploited,**

**but emptied himself,**

**taking the form of a slave,**

**being born in human likeness.**

<SLIDE 33>

**And being found in human form,**

**he humbled himself**

**and became obedient to the point of death—**

**even death on a cross.**

(Philippians 2:5-8)

The Jews were disappointed.

<SLIDE 34>

We can gain an understanding of the effects of disappointed prophecy from modern sociology. Leon Festinger<sup>2</sup> and co-workers witnessed in 1954 a modern version of the events that shaped Christianity. They studied a small apocalyptic cult, the Seekers, which predicted that the end of the world would occur on December 21, 1954. Their leader Dorothy Martin “claimed to have received messages from ‘the Guardians,’ a group of superior beings from another planet.”

---

<sup>2</sup> *When Prophecy fails*

When the divine visitor, the spaceman, failed to appear, *the belief arose spontaneously that another miracle had occurred*; only this miracle was missed. The dramatic aspect of the prophecy, the visitation, got the believers' full attention and it could be explained that they inadvertently missed a miracle that had occurred right under their noses, *due to inattention*. The miracle was that Mr Keech, the husband of one of the devotees was to have died and been resurrected that same evening.

And so, in the chaos of the war, Jesus came, died and was resurrected, but as in the case of Mr Keech, there were no witnesses. The proposition was proved not by witnesses as Paul knew, (hence he never sought the proof in Jerusalem or elsewhere in Israel) but by appealing to the ancient Jewish writings – what we call the Old Testament. For example, the phrase "as it is written" appears sixteen times in Paul's letter to the Romans.

<SLIDE 35>

### **—God's punishment**

God's punishment for national and individual sins is a consistent theme in the Jewish Scriptures, but the idea was not confined to the Jews.

The letter of the pagan *Mara Bar Serapion*, dated sometime in the first three centuries after AD70, says,

<SLIDE 36>

**For what benefit did the Athenians obtain by putting Socrates to death, seeing that they received as retribution for it, famine and pestilence? Or the people of Samos by the burning of Pythagoras, seeing that in one hour the whole of their country was covered with sand? Or the Jews by the murder of their Wise King, seeing that from that very time their kingdom was driven away from them?**

Usually, this text is used to prove Jesus's historicity, but careful reading leads to the opposite conclusion.

What does it say? *...from that very time their kingdom was driven away from them...*

When did the Jews lose their kingdom? In AD70.

Why did the Jews lose their kingdom? They had unwittingly killed their Messiah, their wise leader, who also (according to the theology of the Christians) happened to be the son of God.

<SLIDE 37>

**—Is there any ancient documentary evidence to support this proposition?**

Yes, there is.

We have not got time in this short lecture to go into all the evidence. You will find it detailed in Part 2 of my book *On Christian Origins*. There I have classified the evidence according to source.

- **The church fathers**
- **Astronomy**
- **The New Testament**
- **Extra-canonical works**
- **Numismatics**
- **Jewish Evidence**
- **Roman Historians**
- **Josephus**
- **Theology**

There is for example **the Jewish evidence**.

There is a documented Jewish tradition which states that the Messiah was born in the year 70. From the *Barcelona Disputation* of 1263, Nahmanides, one of the greatest figures in the history of Jewish learning, and Jewish spokesman at the disputation, reports as follows,

<SLIDE 38>

**Fray Paul [the Christian disputant] now resumed and argued that *it is stated in the Talmud that the Messiah has already come*. He cited the Aggadah in the Midrash of Lamentations: A certain man was ploughing and his cow lowed.**

<SLIDE 39>

**An Arab passed by and said to him, “Jew, Jew, untie your cow, untie your plough, untie your coulter, for *the Temple has been destroyed.*” He untied his cow, he untied his plough, he untied his coulter. The cow lowed a second time. The Arab said to him, “Tie up your cow, tie up your plough, tie up your coulter, for *your Messiah has been born.*”**

<SLIDE 40>

—What about Paul?

**Is it possible that Paul preached after AD70?**

**Yes, it is in Jerome.** Jerome says explicitly that Paul flourished after the War.

<SLIDE 41>

**Paul, formerly called Saul, an apostle outside the number of the twelve apostles, was of the tribe of Benjamin and the town of Giscalis in Judea. When this was taken by the Romans he removed with his parents to Tarsus in Cilicia.<sup>3</sup>**

Furthermore, Jerome says<sup>4</sup>,

---

<sup>3</sup> *De Viris Illustribus*, Paul

<sup>4</sup> *Letters*, 46.4.

<SLIDE 42>

**The veil of the temple has been rent<sup>5</sup>; an army has encompassed Jerusalem, it has been stained by the blood of the Lord. Now, therefore, its guardian angels have forsaken it and the grace of Christ has been withdrawn.**

<SLIDE 43>

**Josephus, himself a Jewish writer, asserts that at the Lord's crucifixion there broke from the temple voices of heavenly powers, saying: Let us depart hence.<sup>6</sup>**

Note that Paul in his letters shows no knowledge or acceptance of the gospel version of events.

<SLIDE 44>

**—What about Peter, James and all the others?**

We can reasonably surmise that they also flourished after AD70. **From Galatians we learn that Paul is their contemporary.**

---

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 27:51.

<sup>6</sup> *Wars of the Jews*, Book 6.5.3.

<SLIDE 45>

—Is there any evidence of post AD70 provenance in Paul's letters?

Yes, there is.

In Paul's first letter to the believers in Thessalonica, he writes,

<SLIDE 46>

**...the Jews ... killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins; but God's wrath *has overtaken them* at last. (2:14-16)**

The letter to the Romans was written after 70. Paul says, regarding the Jews,

<SLIDE 47>

**I ask, then, has God *rejected* his people? (11:1)**

**They *were broken off* because of their unbelief. (11:20)**

**There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, *the Jew first* and also the Greek. (2:9)**

We conclude that the humiliation and defeat of the Jews and destruction of the Temple are past events in Paul's writings. This also agrees with Paul's theology which talks about the end of the Law and the uselessness of the Law. (Romans 7:25 and 10:4, Ephesians 2:14) In other words, the Law had been physically ended when Paul was preaching. He was not preaching a hypothetical concept. He was leveraging actual events.

<SLIDE 48>

### —Answering an objection

But the objection is raised, "Paul doesn't directly mention the destruction of Jerusalem or the Temple." But would we expect him to, after a space of say eight or more years?

Take a modern example of church dogma written after a major war – the encyclicals of Pope Pius XI written after World War 1. Four years after the end of the war, the Pope issued his first encyclical *Ubi Arcano Dei Consilio*. In this work of about 11,500 words the Great War is mentioned *fourteen times*. Nine years later the same term gets *only one mention* in his much longer *Quadragesimo Anno*. Both encyclicals deal with similar themes. Using the writings of the Pope as a guide and noting the indirect references to the War in Paul, we can reasonably speculate that he was writing about 10 years after the event.

We can also say (although I don't like using this argument) that there was ample opportunity for revisionist scribes to delete portions of Paul's letters they found inconsistent with the church's myth of origins.

<SLIDE 49>

**—Could a religion like Christianity arise again?**

If this happened once it could happen again and it did. The rumour of the coming of the Messiah arose *among Jews* AGAIN in the 12th century.

From Maimonides, *Epistle to Yemen*, we learn,

<SLIDE 50>

**About fifty years ago or less, a pious and virtuous man and scholar by the name of Moses Al-Dar'i came from Dar'a to the province of Andalusia to study under Rabbi Joseph ha-Levi, of blessed memory, ibn Migash, of whom you very likely have heard.**

<SLIDE 51>

**Later he left for Fez, the center of Maghreb. People flocked to him because of his piety, virtue and learning. He informed them that *the Messiah had come*, as was divinely revealed to him in a dream.**

<SLIDE 52>

Yet he did not pretend on the basis of a divine communication, as did the former lunatic, that he was the Messiah. He merely affirmed that *the Messiah had appeared*. Many people became his adherents and reposed faith in him.

<SLIDE 53>

## SUMMARY

- (1) Note **the silence of the pagan and Jewish sources** (especially Philo, Josephus and Seneca) regarding a Messiah called Jesus appearing before the year AD70.
- (2) **Sociology** explains how the religion arose when the Messianic prophecies failed.
- (3) **The gospels** were written to explain how the religion arose, *and to give substance to the rumour that the Messiah had appeared at that time*.
- (4) **Successful religions** such as Christianity, **bolt from the starting blocks**. They do not linger in the backblocks for 40 or 50 years.
- (5) The religion was proved by **textual interpretation, not eyewitnesses**.
- (6) **The rumour** that the Messiah had appeared, arose again in **the 12th century**.

Additional arguments and evidence are presented and discussed in my book *On Christian Origins*, available from Vivid Publishing.

<http://www.vividpublishing.com.au/onchristianorigins/>

Additional papers and resources by the author are available from this website,

<http://www.religionfreeworld.org/>

See the video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KvUrfrU8kA>

Christian Origins - what really happened 2000 years ago