

“Scott Douglas is a very fine writer, a very funny guy, and someone who thinks and cares deeply about things of faith. When you combine those attributes (and ignore his sometimes questionable taste in music—One Direction! Really?), you get *#OrganicJesus*. And that’s a good thing. This is a special book, suitable for people coming to Christianity for the first time, as well as for folks who have been following The Way a long time . . . but need a little lift in their Christian walk. Anne Lamott calls laughter ‘carbonated holiness.’ You’ll laugh, sure. But you’ll get a little carbonated holiness, too.”
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—CHASE ANDRE, writer, speaker, academic, ChaseAndre.com

#OrganicJesus



finding your way
to an unprocessed,
gmo-free christianity

SCOTT DOUGLAS

 **Kregel**
Publications

*#OrganicJesus: Finding Your Way to an Unprocessed,
GMO-Free Christianity*
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*For
Mordecai Max
La Counte*

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Introduction



Organic Jesus

#FaithMisadventures



Organic Fruit



Organic Toilet Paper



Organic Jesus

It used to be easier. Before distractions. And questions. And doubts. Before I forgot which way was up and which way was down. It was easier then. And it can be easier again. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's go back.

.snoitcerid gnorw eht erofeb kcaB.

Back to when things were right.

There were thousands there that day.

It was a larger audience than any baseball game I had seen in the same venue. I was seven, and the fierce preacher in the middle of the stadium spoke boldly about the person I had grown up hearing about every night before bed.

The preacher was Billy Graham, and this was his 1985 crusade at Anaheim Stadium.



Throughout this book, you will see a “Share” logo beside different images, polls, and text. If you visit www.organicjesus.com/share-this, you will see an option to share any of these ideas on your favorite social network.

As his sermon wound down and he began talking about knowing Christ personally, my mom and a woman from church asked my brother and me if we’d like to go onto the field and accept Jesus Christ.

My brother answered with an energetic yes, and I also quickly agreed. He was my older brother, and I’d have followed him anywhere.

Hundreds, perhaps even thousands, joined us on the field where we prayed.

I was too young then to realize the consequence of my decision. Too young to know that there would come temptation, confusion, and even doubt. All I knew was that this Jesus guy I had heard so much about could be known even better, and why wouldn’t I want that?

Nearly twenty years later, in 2004, an aging Billy Graham was on the last legs of his public ministry. I heard he was speaking at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California, and I couldn’t resist attending.

Just as before, the stadium was filled to capacity with thousands of seekers, doubters, and believers—all there to see this great preacher who had delivered his message to audiences around the world.

But times had changed, for both Graham and me. Graham was now in his eighties. Parkinson’s disease had taken a noticeable toll, and his voice and stance were frail. But the energy was still there.

I was now in my twenties. I was still a believer, but I had been raised in a generation that questioned everything and trusted no one. The Christ that I had accepted nearly twenty years before wasn’t so simple anymore.



My childhood—my entire life—had been spent in what some have called a hotbed of fundamental or evangelical Christianity:

Orange County, California.¹ Christianity in my youth wasn't just the right choice; it was the only choice. Anyone who believed in anything else was crazy, or at least wasn't thinking logically.

That Christianity worked in high school, but in college it got a little trickier.

I began to hear from professors who gave a reason to be skeptical of belief, and it was one that, in academia, seemed to be unanimously accepted.

The older I got and the longer I studied, the more I saw that the Christianity of my childhood had holes in it that I had previously not seen. I didn't doubt my faith, but as I entered my thirties I started to feel troubled by it. I felt like I was looking at a two-dimensional Jesus, and I needed to find the next layer in order to hold on to faith.

WikiBreak

SHARE



NOTE TO READER: I get it—you need to be constantly distracted with interruptions, and facts really don't mean anything. To help you out and keep you in the book, this book will have the occasional "Wiki Break" to help satisfy your urge to leave temporarily.

Anaheim has always had a frequent history of turning failed music venues into churches. After the success of Disneyland's opening in 1955, businesses flocked to the resort area, looking to capitalize on the boost in tourism. Leo Freedman was one such entrepreneur; he saw an opportunity to create a theater where tourists could see concerts, plays, and various entertainers. So it was that Melodyland opened in 1963, a few hundred feet from Disney's entrance.

By the late 1960s, the likes of Bill Cosby, Grateful Dead, and James Brown had all graced the stage. But the talents weren't enough to

1. It was home of the Trinity Broadcasting Network and of the stunningly tacky Crystal Cathedral (which made an appearance in the new Star Trek franchise and has since been sold to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange).

support the venue, and in 1969 the site was put up for auction. The Reverend Ralph Wilkerson purchased the property and the name was changed to Melodyland Christian Center. For several dozen years it was used as everything from a church and a Christian music venue to a theology school. The church ultimately moved from the property, and in 2003 the site was demolished to make way for one of Anaheim's most disastrous projects in recent history: The Anaheim Gardenwalk.² Any trace of the old building is gone.³

In 1987, the Celebrity Theatre opened behind Anaheim's City Hall to equally big acts, from the Red Hot Chili Peppers to the Beach Boys. The year of its opening, George Harrison, Tom Petty, and Jeff Lynne all traveled down to the little 2,500-capacity theater to see Roy Orbison. Backstage, one of the greatest supergroups in music history was born: The Traveling Wilburys. Yet again, despite the big names, the theater was financially doomed and closed its doors in 1994. It was revived under new ownership in the late nineties only to close again a short time later. In 2013, the property was purchased by The Rock Church.

In the midst of my finding that third dimension, everyone was trying to be original on Twitter. So I created @The140Bible, my attempt to condense each chapter of the New Testament into 140 Twitter characters. It connected with several thousand people for a reason all too common with anything today: our attention spans are getting shorter. Pastors have to deliver sermons in short, punchy, formulaic doses. It's rare for me to hear anything a pastor says in a sermon without being tempted to turn to my phone to research something it reminded me of. I might start with something like Occam's razor.⁴ I end up ten minutes later reading a Wiki page

2. An outdoor mall that is largely abandoned aside from a few restaurants and small stores.

3. Even the namesake street name, Freedman Way, has been changed to Disney Way.

4. A rule that states everything should be explained in the simplest way possible.

about the next feature film of Héctor Elizondo,⁵ and I have no idea what the sermon was even about.

But getting back to the 140Bible: by the time I finished the project, I began to question how we could deeply understand God in the digital age.



When I was in high school, I won a children’s Bible in a church bingo game. It was full of illustrations and told the stories of the Bible in short doses—the kind of Bible meant to capture the attention of a nine-year-old.

Despite being baptized and a churchgoing Christian all of my childhood, I had never read (or even opened) the numerous Bibles that had been given to me over the years. The Bible was a big, intimidating book. But this Bible had pictures—lots of pictures—and I decided to do something I had never before done with a Bible: read it.

Despite years of Sunday school teachings, I had never understood the Bible—perhaps because I was too busy coloring pictures instead of listening to the lessons. But this Bible opened doors for me and made me want to know more.

Soon after reading the children’s Bible, I began reading “real” Bibles from cover to cover. When I finished one translation, I started another. On the side, I began reading any theology book I could get my hands on.

First Peter 3:15 says that we should always be prepared to give a reason for the hope that we have. For me, that meant I should find out every reason why people don’t believe in Christianity, so I began working on my college degree in comparative religions. All of this started with a teenager reading a dumbed-down Bible meant for a little kid.

5. Don’t let the name distract you and lead you to a Wiki quest of your own—he won an Emmy for his role in *Chicago Hope* but is perhaps best remembered for playing Joe in the *Princess Diaries* movies.

Both the children’s Bible and the 140Bible had the same purpose: to simplify the Bible. And yet one had been the gateway to making me more spiritual and closer to God, and the other had made me feel more . . . distant. The Internet could put everything at our fingertips—except God.



As I unloaded groceries from the car on a recent trip to the store, my wife, Diana, grabbed one of the bags and pulled out the pack-

age of toilet paper I had picked up. She read the label and then said, irritated, “This toilet paper isn’t organic.”

“Do they make it organic?”

“You can get anything organic.”

She tossed the paper aside. “I hope you realize that this is infested with inks and dyes. Don’t complain to me if you’re feeling itchy down there.”

I walked to the bush in front of our house and pulled off a bundle of leaves. I handed it to Diana and said, “Here’s some organic toilet paper for

you—I’ll take my chances with the dyes.”

I’m not sure when the organic kick began, but it used to be much simpler: certain fruits and veggies were to be avoided if they were not organic. Over the years, though, it has gotten more complicated. Clothing, furniture, and now, apparently, toilet paper need to be produced organically.

USELESS POLL

The idea of organic living is . . .

- A. too expensive for me.
- B. a nonnegotiable. I work at Whole Foods just so I can get organic produce as soon as it comes in.
- C. an option when it’s available and I can afford it.
- D. not for me until they make organic Pepsi.

To be part of this poll, visit:
www.OrganicJesus.com/useless-polls

SHARE



WikiBreak

Despite the boom of organic everything in recent times, the organic movement actually began dozens of years ago. It was first popularized by English botanist Sir Albert Howard. While some farmers

were using the advances of the industrial revolution to make their crops cheaper, Howard was in India studying traditional farming techniques. His classic work, *An Agricultural Testament*, published in 1940, remains a seminal work for anyone studying the principles of organic farming.

In 1939, Lady Eve Balfour and Alice Debenham, influenced by the earlier writings of Howard, began the Haughley Experiment. The women did a side-by-side comparison of organic and chemical-based farming. Their findings were published in the now out-of-print book, *The Living Soil*. Among other things, the experiment proved there could indeed be health benefits from organic farming.

To some people, even me at times, my wife's fixation on organic is extreme. The question about toilet paper, however, made me wonder about something more deeply profound than toilet paper usually suggests: Can we live our spiritual lives in an organic way?

Why do we buy organic? Because we want something at its purest. We are seeking something with earth-made ingredients that haven't been treated or created with chemicals.

A few years ago, someone asked me how to get a teen interested in the Bible, and I told the person to give the teen a children's Bible. The longer you go to church the easier it is to forget one of Jesus's greatest lessons: the kingdom of heaven belongs to children.⁶ To really understand God, it's best to strip everything away, to get rid of all the distractions and see God as a child might.

The troubled feeling I had been experiencing came from not having been told the complete story about who Jesus is. I needed to search and uncover the Organic Jesus—to take away the Wiki journeys to pointlessness and all the things that had created a flavorful, chemically produced, spectacle-driven Jesus—to strip it all away and return to the Jesus I knew before I ever owned a computer or heard of the Internet. The Jesus I innocently accepted at age seven.

There are two Christianities. There's the one you hear about at

6. Matthew 19:14.

church and then go home and forget about. But there's also the one you hear about at church and then go home and decide to learn more about. That second Christianity can be wild and wacky—because it involves a superhero.

If you really want to know this epic superhero you've entrusted your life to, then it's time to go on a journey to discover his origin story.

Getting Social

It's hard to do anything without running to your favorite social network to tell the world what you just read, said, or ate. To help you, I will suggest social media responses at the end of each chapter.

Twitter: Pick out a favorite passage from this chapter and add #OrganicJesus. Other acceptable hashtags include #OrganicToiletPaper and #FaithMisadventures.

Pinterest: Go to your favorite online store of choice and find the most bizarre organic products. Pin them to your board with #OrganicJesus.

Instagram: Print out a Christian coloring sheet. Color it, then scan it and add it to your Instagram feed.

LinkedIn: Seriously? You want to respond socially on LinkedIn? Perhaps you are a little *too* social?

Facebook: Add your favorite passage from this chapter.



Which Bible Hero Are You?

NOTE TO READER: This quiz will make more sense when you get to the end of the book and get instructions. For now, just circle or remember your answer—

or skip to the end and ruin everything. You can also take the quiz here: www.OrganicJesus.com/bible-hero-quiz.

When people see you at church, what are they most likely to think?

- A. "They should be on the praise team." (+1)
- B. "They're in the right place." (+3)
- C. "They'll stick to this church in all situations." (+5)
- D. "They should be an elder." (+7)
- E. "Are they talking to themselves or God?" (+9)
- F. "What are *they* doing here?" (+11)

PartOne



Not Yo Mama's Christianity

ChapterOne



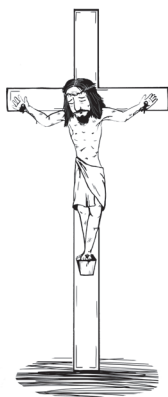
The Passion of the Jew

#WayBackFaith

SHARE



Sad Jesus



Catholic Jesus



Hipster Jesus

Wailing.

That's the sound I remember most from *The Passion of the Christ*. It came from two rows behind and was occasionally followed by a tearful, "They're killing Jesus."

There were other vocalizations besides. When the movie began, a woman a few rows back loudly exclaimed, "Subtitles? They'll start talking in English, right?" There were lots of gasps and a surprising number of *Praise Jesuses*. The guy next to me nudged me early in

the movie and said, with his mouth full of popcorn, “This is really sad, no?”

But it's the wailing I remember most.

Like everyone else in the nation, I had heard a lot about Mel Gibson's graphically brutal love song to the Messiah. I had heard three separate sermons from two different pastors on why I had to see this movie. Every magazine, secular and Christian alike, said the same thing. One magazine in particular suggested that not seeing this movie would be un-Christian.

I love gory movies. If it has the word *Tarantino* in it, I'm in. But I always felt conflicted about movies that portrayed Christ. There's no artist in the world who can accurately portray him, so why try?

So I didn't go at first. Not until my grandma guilted me into it. She had already seen it something like fourteen times. The same way some women went repeatedly to see *Twilight* and *Titanic*,¹ my grandma went to see *The Passion*; if there was a person who hadn't seen it, she'd tug their arm and pull them into the next showing.

Ten minutes into the movie, all I could think about was the Krispy Kreme donut shop that had opened in the parking lot of the movie theater. I know people were moved to tears by the movie, but the message was lost on me. It wasn't a movie about Christ's pain—it was a movie about some guy getting beaten to death. I understood that the whole purpose of a passion play was to show this, but the movie just didn't work for me. It didn't work for my stomach either; where other people would wince at the lashing, my stomach would growl and, loudly and inappropriately, remind me how much I wanted that donut.

Still, I stuck with it. According to some articles I read, it was my Christian duty to support this movie. If nothing else, I knew it

1. In college, a professor asked if anyone had seen *Titanic* more than once, and a woman raised her hand and joyfully announced that she had seen the movie twenty-three times. It had been out one month, and she went nearly every day.

would have a happy ending, and the two hours of blood would be worth it. The ultimate message of love and redemption would be revealed.

A funny thing happened on the way to the ending: a shadowy figure left the tomb—one could only assume it was Jesus²—and the credits rolled.

Before I saw the movie, I heard pastor after pastor say this was a great evangelical movie. But when I saw the ending, I just didn't get it. I couldn't imagine that any person who didn't already understand what the death and resurrection of Christ meant would walk away from this movie and say, "Now I get it!" If I wasn't a Christian, I would have walked away and said, "That was messed up what they did to Jesus." And that's it.

I looked at my watch as I walked out of the theater, and I sighed sadly. On top of having seen one of the most pointless and depressing movies of my life, Krispy Kreme was closed.

As I thought about the Organic Jesus, *The Passion* is one of the first things that crossed my mind. Despite my expressed distaste for the movie, it opened up dialogue for a topic that was frequently overlooked: the historical Jesus.

Jesus was God. And Jesus was man.

To understand the human nature of Christ, it helps to strip away everything the Bible tells us about his divine nature and the wise things he said, and to just think about what history may tell us about him.

There are many things with regard to any religion that have to be taken by faith. Religion by its very principle is not always logical; in essence, faith is believing in something you cannot understand with rational thought. But while Christianity may have fundamental principles based solely on faith, it is also grounded in fundamental truths that are based on logic. One such truth is that Jesus Christ actually existed.

2. Or a slimmed-down and slightly more fit Mel Gibson.

SHARE



WikiBreak

The Passion of the Christ is a variant of something that has been around for hundreds of years: the passion play. Passion plays, which are themselves a variant of Easter plays, depict the trial, suffering, and death of Jesus.

The plays were always crowd-pleasers. (Who, after all, doesn't absolutely love to see the guy they worship beaten?) They became so popular that the fifteenth-century equivalent of liberal Hollywood swooped in and tried to secularize them. It got to a point where the plays were more like an episode of *South Park*, complete with obscene jokes and swearing. This, of course, upset the church, so they began banning "secular" versions. By the sixteenth century, the old-school plays were back, but their sexiness was gone, and the crowds went with it. Passion plays disappeared almost entirely until the nineteenth century, when they were rediscovered and haven't gone away since.

Today the biggest passion play is in New Jerusalem. Not *that* New Jerusalem; think Brazil. The New Jerusalem theater in Brejo da Madre de Deus was built in 1968 with one purpose: to host passion performances. Considered the largest open-air theater in the world, it features nine stages, sixty main actors, five hundred extras, four hundred crew members, and eight hundred costume pieces.

If you can't afford the cost of venturing down to South America, I suggest you read the book. It's called the Bible, and it has a lot of scenes that didn't make it into the play.

Full disclosure: we're about to get historical. After this point, there are going to be a lot of references to historical events, seminars, and other things some people do not find interesting. Don't worry. It's going to be okay. I'll get you through it.

If you feel intimidated, music helps. Following is a playlist of seven songs about historical events to get you in the mood.

“1913 Massacre” by Woody Guthrie. It’s never a good idea to yell “Fire!” in a crowded building when there is no fire. The event happened on December 24, 1913, at the Italian Hall in Calumet, Michigan. Seventy-three people were killed while fleeing the building.

“April 29, 1992 (Miami)” by Sublime. Depending on your view, this song is about the 1992 Los Angeles Riots. Though the name of the song gives the correct date of the riots, the lyrics refer to April 26. Apparently the band members were so moved by the event that they couldn’t get the date right.

“The Lords of Salem” by Rob Zombie. Zombie goes old-school on this classic ditty about the Salem Witch Trials.

“When the Tigers Broke Free” by Pink Floyd. This song describes the death of Roger Waters’s father in Operation Shingle, a WWII amphibious landing battle that took place several months before the Battle of Normandy in Italy.

“Back to December” by Taylor Swift. The song is allegedly about Swift’s breakup with Taylor Lautner. Though the song doesn’t mention it, one can speculate that Swift felt forced to break up with Lautner upon realizing that if they ever married, they’d have the exact same name.

“Suffer Little Children” by The Smiths. The song is about the notorious Moors Murders. The Moors Murders took place in England between 1963 and 1965. During those years, Ian Brady and Myra Hindley murdered five children between the ages of ten and seventeen.

“Louisiana 1927” by Randy Newman. He may be better known for film scores, but Newman is also a great storyteller. Such is the case with this song about the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, which was the most destructive river flood in US history.



It all began on a dark and stormy night in the seventeenth century. It was England, so let's just say it was gloomy too. The printing press had been alive and kicking out books for quite some time, and people were starting to get . . . enlightened. (Maybe that's how they came up with the term for that period: the Age of Enlightenment?)

It's hard to place a firm starting date, but we can certainly point out some of the key players: Baruch Spinoza, Voltaire, and Isaac Newton. They were the original bad boys of intellectualism, and they were on a mission to change things up.

Amongst other contributions, these three said, "Just because we've always believed this way doesn't mean we have to continue to believe this way." It was a naughty way of thinking, and they took some heat for it.

At first people started to rethink things like science and math. It didn't take long for someone to get religious and bring Christ into the Enlightenment conversation. And so it was that scholars began to wonder if there was more to Jesus than what the Bible said. They began to look for historical evidence.

Albert Schweitzer is the one responsible for coining the term *historical Jesus* when he wrote the book *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* in 1906.³ Schweitzer was not the first, however, to provide scholarly research into the historicity of Christ. The quest for the historical Jesus first caught on in the eighteenth century, most notably with David Strauss, who popularized what would be known as the "Myth Theory" when he published *Das Leben Jesu, Kritisch Bearbeitet* (translation: *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*).⁴

Over the past several hundred years, there have been several variants of the Christ myth theory. Each variant essentially says one of three things:

3. Yes, the very Albert Schweitzer who appeared (fictionalized) in not one but two episodes of *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles*.

4. Another popular myth supporter was Bruno Bauer, a mentor of Karl Marx.

1. There was no historic figure named Jesus; Jesus was, in fact, invented by early Christians.
2. There was “technically” a person named Jesus, but all the teachings and miracles are either made up or metaphorical/symbolic.
3. Jesus is really a composite of several different people over a period of time.

The problem with all three of these theories is simple: there’s historic evidence from nonbelievers that debunks them.

Which leads us to (*drumroll*) . . . The Quest for the Historical Jesus (*wild applause*).



My introduction to the so-called “historical Jesus” took place when I was a teen. The minister was preaching a rather windy sermon about who Christ was. At the end, he paused, looked dramatically at his notes, and then made a startling pronouncement: “Over my dozens of years of scholarly reading and research, I have come to the conclusion that Christ could not have performed the miracles in the Bible. He was an amazing teacher—perhaps greater than any we will ever know—and his teachings should be followed and abided.”

What surprised me more than the minister’s declaration was that he was not fired. Many people at the church concluded that it was all a giant misunderstanding and he didn’t mean it “like that.”

But he did mean it “like that,” and he preached it again in several other sermons.

In the end, it didn’t matter to most of the people in the church. They were there for the long haul, and a greater sin than saying you didn’t believe in the miracles of Christ was saying you did not believe in the church. Church, for a lot of people, is the foundation of their life. The message is just a happy coincidence.

Not until a year after that sermon did I again encounter the historical Jesus. It was during an introduction to religion course that

I took during my first year in college. The course covered all the major religions, from Eastern religions like Hinduism to Western religions like Judaism.

Christianity was taught halfway through the class and was met with the most interest. The teacher, an energetic older man whose

clothes got drenched in sweat halfway through his lectures, began his lecture with these words: “Everything you learned about Jesus from Sunday school . . . is a lie.”

There were three quests for the historical Jesus,⁵ each more controversial than the previous one. The third was the most controversial and the one most commonly referred to in colleges across the country. It was also the

one my former minister so fondly followed. Among other things, it questioned the plausibility of Jesus’s miraculous actions.

My college professor was eager to discuss one of the greatest groups in modern Christian scholarship: The Jesus Seminars. The Jesus Seminars was made popular in the 1980s and 1990s. It was made up of 150 scholars who would sit around and vote about what they believed Jesus did or didn’t do by casting votes with colored beads. They essentially re-created the Gospels by removing anything they did not think was true.

As hard as I tried to listen to the professor explain his fondness for his beloved Jesus Seminars, it was hard to take him seriously when he referenced the beads. His description of old men tossing around beads felt more like Mardi Gras than academia.

“They said why they believed or didn’t believe though, right?” a student asked at one point.

The professor looked at him, confused. “They didn’t need to—

USELESS POLL

My favorite historical Bible movie is . . .

- A. *The Ten Commandments*.
- B. *King of Kings*.
- C. *The Life of Brian*.
- D. any VeggieTales movie.
- E. *Noah*.

To be part of this poll, visit:
www.OrganicJesus.com/useless-polls

5. The first began in the nineteenth century, when literally hundreds of “biographies” of Jesus were published.

the action of throwing the beads said it all.” He added, as a way of clearing up all confusion, “The beads were colored.”



When I began my own quest to see who Jesus *really* was, I was almost immediately reintroduced to the now disbanded Jesus Seminars. Their quest for the historical Jesus may be a bit liberal for some, but it did do one important thing: it proved that Jesus did exist. Even the most liberal religious scholars will agree on two things: one, the baptism of Jesus happened; and two, the crucifixion was real.

There are two notable historic historians people talk about when they mention the history of Christ. The first is Titus Flavius Josephus (AD 37–ca. 100).⁶ Josephus was a historian who wrote about different events of the Roman Empire. A Jewish soldier who fought in the First Jewish-Roman War as head of the Jewish forces in Galilee, Josephus after the war became a Roman citizen and friend to the emperor’s son. His most important contribution to Christianity was his book *Antiquities of the Jews*. It’s important for this reason: Josephus was a non-Christian who references Jesus Christ. The book provides three key passages that help prove the existence of Jesus.

In book 20, chapter 9, section 1, Josephus writes regarding the crucifixion: “He assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others.”⁷

In 18.5.2, Josephus writes of John the Baptist, “Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod’s army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist: for Herod slew him, who was a good man.”

6. Sorry . . . more history stuff follows. You have the music on, right?

7. All passages from Josephus’s work were translated by William Whiston.

Finally, in 18.3.3, Josephus writes,

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.

Some scholars have tried to discredit this third passage, saying the content was added at a later date by someone else; this certainly *might* be true, but the writing style does appear to match Josephus. The fact is, however, there are two passages that are almost unanimously undisputed, and a third that, while debatable, certainly seems likely.

The other historian of note was Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (or Suetonius, as he was known to his homeboys). Suetonius was a Roman historian who is best known for writing biographies about Roman rulers. In his work *Claudius*, Suetonius says, “Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [the emperor] expelled them to Rome.”⁸ Nearly every scholar agrees that Chrestus is a reference to Christ.⁹

Those are the two main writings commonly referenced; however, a slew of other historians provide further corroboration. Publius (or Gaius) Cornelius Tacitus, a Roman senator and historian, is one.

8. Translated by J. C. Rolfe.

9. The text is also believed to be paralleled in Acts 18:2.

His last work, *The Annals*, is the one most important to the history of the Christ. In *The Annals* 15.44, he writes,

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind.¹⁰

Mara Bar-Serapion is a bit of a mystery. It's known that he was a philosopher, and that's about it. He's most known for a letter he wrote to his son. The letter contains this passage: "What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise king? It was just after that their kingdom was abolished."¹¹

The reference to a king of the Jews is of note.

There were other books that support the existence of Christ; unfortunately, they have mostly been lost or are simply not reliable. Notably, there was Thallus, a historian we know very little of but who, in his book *History*, writes of an earthquake and great darkness, similar to what the New Testament mentions when Jesus was crucified. *Acts of Pilate* is allegedly an official document from Pontius Pilate and mentions an account of Jesus; unfortunately,

10. Translated by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb.

11. F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 117.

this text was most likely written by Christians and is not authentic. There is also Celsus, whose work did not survive; however, it is known that he wrote a document that attacked the Christian faith. He believed Jesus was merely a magician and sorcerer, but it's of important note because he acknowledged that Jesus existed and performed what Christians call miracles and what he called trickery.

The question is not whether Jesus Christ actually existed—it's whether he was who he said he was.



So that was quite a bit of information. Let me pause and lay it out briefly one more time—this time as a PowerPoint presentation:

Slide One—A giant word art smashes on the slide using a fancy turning-type animation. When you get over how awesome the animation was, you realize it says, “Age of Enlightenment.” But before you can take that in, images of Newton, Spinoza, and Voltaire flash on the slide. Voltaire, with his sexy, long, flowing hair, is of course the best-looking of the bunch. Spinoza looks a little like a stoner, and Newton looks constipated.

Slide Two—An image of Friedrich von Thun, who played Albert Schweitzer in *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles*, dances across the slide until it finds its place appropriately in the center. Von Thun is slightly more fetching than the real Schweitzer and is a much better selection for the slide. The image fades out and Schweitzer's book, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, appears in its place.

Slide Three—Text comes onto the slide with a seesaw effect. It reads “Myth Theory.” Below it, three pictures appear. The first is a poorly illustrated stick figure drawing of Christians creating a man; the second is another poorly drawn image of

what may or may not be Jesus, and who is definitely not performing miracles; and finally, there are several questionable stick figures which all look the same—clearly a weak effort to show a weak theory.

Slide Four—We see a picture of a man I thought was Jaleel White (who played Steve Urkel on *Family Matters*) standing in front of a camera shop at Disneyland. It turned out it wasn't him.¹²

Slide Five—Two photos of a marble bust appear on the slide. One is the younger and more dapper looking Josephus, and the other is the older Suetonius.

Slide Six—This last slide shows the text “You can download this presentation here: . . .” Curiously, no website is provided.



The year after *The Passion of the Christ* was released, during Easter, my grandma came over and insisted we watch it again as a family so we could experience the cruel torture of Jim Caviezel together. What better way to celebrate Jesus rising from the dead than to watch a movie that only vaguely references the fact that he did?

I heard a pastor explain how the movie really showed what Jesus went through. So I tried to watch it the second time and do my best to understand it.

No good.

I did not need to know the sheer amount of pain Jesus endured on the way to the cross, and even if I did want to know, no movie—or anything else—could effectively convey that. The pain he experienced was not something we were meant to feel. He experienced it so we wouldn't have to. No amount of sensory detail could help

12. Whoops—I'm not sure how that slide got in there. My apologies.

me know just how much he suffered. What mattered to me was that he was a man—the God-man.

I believe that for many of us there are two Jesuses. There's the one we know as a child or teenager—the one who does awesome things, says awesome things, and is worthy of a t-shirt.

Then there's the Jesus we know as an adult. He's the one who says we have to go to church on Sunday. The problem with the second one is that if we don't take the time to know him, we'll most likely stop listening to him. Maybe we won't stop believing in him, but we'll certainly stop thinking about him.

In college I didn't think much about the historical Jesus (perhaps because I couldn't get past the image of old dudes throwing around colored beads). As I searched for Jesus as an adult, however, I wondered why it is so important to know who Jesus is outside the Bible.

To kids, Jesus seems almost magical: he's walking on water, raising dead people, changing water to wine, and so on. When you believe in someone like that, you'll probably eventually realize that you are believing in an X-Men character, not a Savior. Then you become an adult, and you believe he is real because—well, just because.

But when you believe in something “just because,” it doesn't take much to knock the faith right out of you.

The New Testament tells us there was a man parading around doing some pretty fantastic things. Then when you strip away the Bible and ask, “But who was Jesus really?” what you find is multiple historic books and documents that also say there was a man parading around doing some pretty fantastic things.

For thousands of years, people lived in the dark—and not just because they didn't have electricity, though that didn't help. They accepted what ministers told them because they didn't have much choice. Mostly what they believed then was close to what we believe today, but sometimes it went a little off course.¹³

13. The most famous were the Gnostics, who believed they possessed a secret knowledge of Jesus. To a lesser extent, during the medieval period, legends emerged of dog-headed characters (a belief known as *cynocephaly*).

Then came the Age of Enlightenment, and now we live in a world of doubt. And doubting is a good thing. The Bible is full of doubters—and God loves the doubter as much as he loves believers.

If ever there was a person who should have doubted God, it was David.¹⁴ He spent most of his life on the run, knowing death could find him at any moment. In Psalm 88, perhaps his gloomiest psalm, David concludes, “Darkness is my closest friend.” That psalm is one of the strongest examples of a person doubting; David is in a bad place, and he cries his frustrations and doubts out to God. That’s exactly what God wants.

The disciples were the biggest doubters of them all. Thomas doubted that Jesus rose from the dead until he could put his fingers through the holes in his hands that the nails had made. Peter, earlier in Jesus’s ministry, was able to actually walk on water—until he started to doubt and then sank. Just before Jesus was arrested, it was Peter again who swore up and down he would not disown him—Peter was sure his faith was that strong. But he ended up denying he even knew Jesus three times.

Faith is restored in doubt.

The quest to rediscover Jesus—or perhaps discover him for the first time—should begin with doubt. God can take doubt. If anything is true, then it holds up against all doubt and reveals its true nature. What God can’t take is the doubt that comes naturally, and the questioning that doesn’t follow. It’s in our nature to doubt; when we ignore doubt and believe in spite of what is inside us, then our guard is dropped and we put ourselves at risk of losing everything.

God is fine with my stripping apart Jesus. He’s fine with my saying, “Jesus is real—but I’m not too sure about those miracles.” He’s fine with that because this isn’t the last chapter, not the end of the journey; the quest continues to seek Jesus’s true nature and understand—truly understand—not only who Jesus is, but why we should believe in him.

14. Of David and Goliath fame.

Getting Social

Twitter: Watch *The Passion of the Christ* and live tweet your commentary with the hashtag #passionoftheJew.

Pinterest: Pin every film portrayal of Jesus you can find.

Instagram: Hug your closest Jewish friend and say, "It's not your fault." Then ask to pose for a picture and post it on Instagram with the hashtag #itsnotyourfault.

LinkedIn: Add the church play/musical you did in grade school to your list of previous employers. Bonus points if said play was a passion play. If you were not in a church play or musical, then you can sit this response out.

Facebook: Find embarrassing photos of your friends and family in church plays. Post the photos and tag them.



Which Bible Hero Are You?

What is your dream job?

- A. Writer and/or musician (+1)
- B. Politician (+3)
- C. To run the family business (+5)
- D. CEO (+7)
- E. Meteorologist (+9)
- F. Anything that carries the risk of death and lets me live on the wild side (+11)