

INTRODUCTION

Did Jesus have a child by Mary Magdalene? Was he a Cynic? Or was he a mystic, perhaps even a Gnostic? Did he fake his death and sneak out of the holy land? Did he escape to Egypt? Did he write letters to the Jewish court and explain that it was all a mistake, that he never claimed to be the Son of God? Did he celebrate the Last Supper with friends—twenty-five years after his crucifixion? Has the grave of Jesus been found? Has the grave of his father been found? Are the New Testament Gospels reliable? Are there better sources for the life and teaching of Jesus? Do the Dead Sea Scrolls talk about Jesus? Is the gospel story true? Is there a conspiracy to hide the truth? Indeed, did Jesus ever really exist?

When I first began academic study of Jesus and the Gospels some thirty years ago, I could never have guessed that I or anyone else would find it necessary to write a book addressing such questions. Surely no one in all seriousness would advance such theories. Surely no credible publishers would print them. Yet, all that has happened.

Have you wondered why it is that modern scholars (especially the ones who make it into the popular press) seem so prone to discount the evidence of the Gospels, looking to other sources for information? In several books scholars argue that it is necessary to rely on second- and third-century sources, because our first-century New Testament Gospels are not reliable. Does this make sense? Others claim that there are conspiracies to suppress the evidence. Evidence of what? Why?

We live in a strange time that indulges, even encourages, some of the strangest thinking. It is a time when truth means almost what you want to make of it. And in these zany quests for “truth,” truth becomes elusive. In fact, a book published a few years ago appeared under the title *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used To Be*. Quite so.



What I find particularly troubling is that a lot of the nonsense comes from scholars. We expect tabloid pseudoscholarship from the quacks, but not from scholars who teach at respectable institutions of higher learning.

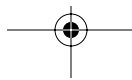
Modern scholars and writers, in their never-ending quest to find something new and to advance daring theories that run beyond the evidence, have either distorted or neglected the New Testament Gospels, resulting in the fabrication of an array of pseudo-Jesuses. A variety of influences have led to these results, whether (1) misplaced faith and misguided suspicions, (2) cramped starting points and overly strict critical methods, (3) questionable texts from later centuries, (4) appeals to contexts alien to Jesus' actual environment, (5) skeletal sayings devoid of context altogether, (6) failure to take into account Jesus' mighty deeds, (7) dubious use of Josephus and other resources of late antiquity (8) anachronisms and exaggerated claims, or (9) ho-kum history and bogus findings. In short, just about every error imaginable has been made. A few writers have made almost all of them.

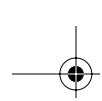
The chapters that follow take up these issues one by one, spending two chapters on questionable texts. The book concludes with an eleventh chapter in which I offer my assessment of important aspects of genuine progress in the study of the historical Jesus, and in which the Gospels inside the New Testament and the Gospels outside the New Testament are treated properly and other relevant primary materials are given their due.

Fabricating Jesus inquires into the thinking and the methods of scholars and popular writers. What presuppositions do they hold? What methods do they use? Why do they move from valid observations to audacious conclusions? Indeed why and how do they fabricate a Jesus different from the one we find in the New Testament? Are these scholars actually using sound historical method? These are some of the questions this book explores.

Fabricating Jesus is designed to speak to a variety of readers. First, this book is written to assist anyone who is confused by the wild theories and conflicting portraits of Jesus, the claims that he really didn't see himself as the Messiah or as God's Son, or that the New Testament Gospels are not trustworthy, or that other sources are better or at least equally valid, and so forth.

Second, the book is written for people who are interested in Jesus and the New Testament Gospels and want to learn more but are baffled by the strange





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books that have appeared in recent years. I hope you haven't given up.

Third, it is written for skeptics, especially those prone to fall for some old nineteenth-century philosophical hokum that almost no one today holds.

Fourth, *Fabricating Jesus* is written for the guild, for the scholars whose profession is to investigate the Gospels and the life and teaching of Jesus, in hope that it may call us not to a lesser standard of scholarship but indeed to a higher one, one which doesn't presume that skepticism equals scholarship.

Finally, this book is written to defend the original witnesses to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. When put to the test, the original documents hold up quite well. Despite their having been maligned, even ridiculed, and pushed into the background, it is time to give them a fresh hearing.

