

# **HOW CHRISTIANITY WAS INVENTED**

**Essay**

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## CONTENTS

Preface	3
Chapter 1 The Great Historian	7
Chapter 2 Josephus or the Evangelists	19
Chapter 3 Birthdates Confused	37
Chapter 4 Four Unknown Greek Writers	50
Chapter 5 The Gospel Script	56
Chapter 6 From Judas to Jesus	60
Chapter 7 Expecting the Messiah	66
Chapter 8 The Historical Jesus	73
Chapter 9 Two Natures in Conflict	83
Chapter 10 The Other Jesus	93
Chapter 11 My Books Tell the Truth	108
Chapter 12 How Christianity Was Invented	114
Chapter 13 <i>Testimonium Flavianum</i> Fraud	119
Chapter 14 In Conclusion	128
 Bibliography	 133

## PREFACE

The subject of the Historicity of the life of Jesus of “Nazareth” and the questions it raised have agitated the thoughts and disturbed the dreams of people of nearly every rank and class over the Western world, for the last five hundred years. Following the hegemonic centuries of Church dominion, interest in the mystery of the origin of Christianity, within the Jewish world of the remote Judean Province of the Roman Empire, has grown unabated.

The German High Critics of the Nineteenth century exemplified by Strauss, and the French Rationalists of the Ernest Renan persuasion, have greatly eroded the religious faith attached to the Gospel narratives, due to their intense study and profound scholarship.

The theory developed by David Friedrich Strauss in his *Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835) was that Jesus is the *impersonation* of an ideal of purely mythic derivation: having existed in *idea*, he was afterwards conceived to have had a corresponding existence in *fact*. His view was partly supported and partly contradicted by the Church theology, which, while it asserts in confirmation that “*Jesus was the lamb slain from the foundation of the world,*” it also asserts in opposition that he was slain *again* in the flesh when Pontius Pilate was procurator of Judea, around 31CE. But this theory is unsatisfactory, because it is not historically grounded, and because no authentic historical explanation is supplied to account for the rise and spread of the traditional belief.

Ernest Renan's theory, as given in his romantic *Vie de Jesus* (1863) was as fanciful in conception as that of Strauss, and was formed in equal disregard of historical accuracy. His chief interest rests in the beauty and

sublimity of the moral teachings of Jesus, as these are reported by the four Evangelists. Renan emphasizes the Jesus character's basic self-consciousness, which, he maintains, because it is absolutely *human*, boldly asserts itself to be equally *divine*.

Both these theories rather reflect the philosophical opinions of their respective authors than any sound criticism of history. Most of the books published in the past fifty years have mainly repeated or amplified the same arguments. Yet, the English-speaking public, generally intensely conservative, is prone to look with skepticism on any departure from ancestral beliefs. It was therefore deemed essential by this author to reopen the case *for* or *against* the historical reality of Jesus, as the answers are of transcendental consequences for believers and unbelievers alike.

The various Christian Churches and the Western World in general have in a higher degree accepted the traditional narratives handed down from the time of Constantine, the first Roman Emperor to officially recognize Christianity as State-protected, in 325CE. A honest search for documentary proof of the facts has led the author of this Essay to seriously question the historical value of the records known today as "*Apostolic Writings*" and "*Early Church Fathers*" – as this has been abundantly discussed in the scholarly volumes of Emil Walter, Arthur Heulhard, Robert Eisler and others referred to in this work. But the surprising development was the rediscovery of genuine historical accounts confirming the existence of certain authentic "*Messianic*" characters alive within the geographical setting and timeframe alluded to by the Christian Tradition. George Solomon wrote *The Jesus of History and the Jesus of Tradition Identified* in 1880, in which he severely condemns the Christian religion as a heresy from the Jewish beliefs, opening up a theological debate that went beyond historical considerations. Solomon, however, clearly

indicated the keys necessary to entangle the greatest of the mysteries of History. This Essay will, therefore, leave out the conflicting theological arguments from the case and, while relying on George Solomon's impeccable research, offer conclusive evidence to prove that the story of the traditional Jesus is a garbled development from a historical root.

For the first time in recent years, we shall strive to introduce to the modern public the real Jesus as known to history, before his figure was distorted by popular belief and hopefully solve the riddle of *How Christianity was Invented*.

# CHAPTER I

## The Great Historian

To write about Jesus at the dawn of the twenty-first century, in a world greatly polarized between religious fundamentalism and philosophical materialism may seem bold, to say the least. However, as it shall appear, we are forced into the arena in the simple interest of truth. Belief in the inerrancy of the Biblical records, particularly the texts that constitute the *New Testament* and their legitimacy to provide us with divinely uttered answers to Humanity's queries, is still high among many people. But is this tacit acceptance of the stories told by the four evangelists, and other Christian writers, really reasonable? Are we certain to possess the actual facts as they happened so long ago? Can we base our metaphysical convictions on such foundations?

Public opinion has it that so many churches cannot be wrong: the testimony of Scriptures must be right. So many generations of writers, poets and highly respected Churchmen would not have been mistaken. We all have placed implicit trust in whatever our forefathers have handed down to us as truth. But, is it *The Truth*? Can we prove or disprove it?

It will be our business to show that the history of the events recorded in the Gospel writings is partly confirmed and partly refuted by a writer who lived contemporarily with the events themselves. It will be our business also, to prove that the narratives known as the four Gospels were indeed composed many years, if not centuries, after the period the events spoken of did occur. We will eventually explain how the Greek scribes compounded several historical characters into one, actually creating a mysterious personage with at least two widely conflicting personalities.

The traditional accounts given by the Apostolic writings of the so-called *Messianic age* are not, therefore, fancy pictures. But their chronology is very seriously at fault, while certain key events and historical characters are literally substantiated by the great contemporary historian referred to.

It has been said that a true historian is one who carefully sifts the pages of documents genuinely confirming the simplest events of his or past generations, always giving the fairest, balanced and, as much as possible, unbiased testimony to be passed on as history to his present and future readers. A difficult task it is and few are the ones that succeed in deserving the title. Even Herodotus, the reputed “Father of History” hardly met the challenge. Julius Caesar probably came closer to this definition in his *Commentaries on the Gallic Wars*, though many disagree. Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* still ranks high in our list. Unfortunately History is written by *victors* and mostly reflects one side of the stories, even opinions about what they think happened in reality.

Who was, then, this great contemporary historian of the period of the birth of the Jesus Story? And what sort of historian was he, if we are to trust his testimony so explicitly?

The internet site [www.ultimatebiblereferencelibrary.com](http://www.ultimatebiblereferencelibrary.com) has the following introduction to their publication of the complete works of Flavius Josephus: “Josephus was born Joseph ben Mattathias in 37CE. in Jerusalem of a priestly and royal family. He excelled in his studies of Jewish law and studied with the Sadducees, Pharisees, and the Essenes, eventually aligning himself with the Pharisees. In 62CE, he went to Rome to free some imprisoned priests. After accomplishing this mission through the intercession of Nero's wife, Poppaea, he returned to



Jerusalem in 65CE to find the country in revolt against Rome. Although Josephus had deep misgivings about the revolt, it became inevitable, due to reasons he discusses in his history, primarily the abuses of the Romans; this spurred the growth of fanatical Messianic Jewish movements which believed that the world was coming to an end shortly. In 66CE, Masada was seized by the Zealots and the Romans were on the march; Josephus was appointed the commander of Galilee.

“Josephus had to fight a defensive war against overwhelming force while refereeing internecine squabbles in the Jewish ranks. In 67CE, Josephus and other rebels were cornered in a cave during the siege of Jotapata and took a suicide pact. However, Josephus survived, and was taken hostage by the Romans, led by Vespasian.

“Josephus shrewdly reinterpreted the Messianic prophecies. He predicted that Vespasian would become the ruler of the 'entire world'. Josephus joined the Romans, for which he was branded a traitor. He acted as consultant to the Romans and a go-between with the revolutionaries. Unable to convince the rebels to surrender, Josephus ended up watching the second destruction of the Temple and the defeat of the Jewish nation. His prophecy became true in 68CE when Nero committed suicide and Vespasian became Caesar. As a result, Josephus was freed; he moved to Rome and became a Roman citizen, taking the Vespasian family name Flavius. Vespasian commissioned Josephus to write a history of the war, which he finished in 78CE, the *Jewish War*. His second major work, the *Antiquities of the Jews*, was completed in 93CE. He wrote *Against Apion* in about 96-100CE and *The Life of Josephus*, his autobiography, about 100CE. He died shortly after.

“Despite his ambivalent role, Josephus was an eyewitness to history, and his writings are considered

authoritative. These texts are key to understanding a pivotal point in world history, which has tragic repercussions even to this day. J. B. H.”

We have preferred this brief introduction of Josephus’s life to begin our study as it translates the generally good opinion entertained by modern-day scholars about this ancient writer. In fact we could complement the record with details supplied by the historian himself in his *Autobiography*. Though he was not liked by all equally, as intimated in the quote given, he had the reputation of historic justice and impartiality above many of the ancient historians of the Roman Empire. In his own days, he was respected for his sagacious intellect and wide experience of affairs. He prided himself to be known as a lover of truth “*neither concealing anything nor adding anything to the known fact of things*”, as he tells us. He did what in him lay to clear the minds of his countrymen of false ideas of their past history, and made it a point of conscience to transmit to posterity a faithful record of contemporary events, and he did so for the express purpose of guarding posterity against being deceived by the numerous spurious accounts in circulation, whose falsehoods were known to him.

Is it not surprising, then, seeing that Josephus possessed such pre-eminent qualifications, and that he is by express definition the historian of the *Messianic age*, — about the events of which there has been more disputation than about those of any other period of history, — that no inquiry has ever been instituted or analysis attempted to establish a parallel, if any, between his account of the time and that of those chroniclers who have since his day gained the ear of Christendom, — a time clearly so important in the make-up of the memory of a greater part of our Western Culture.

Matthias, the father of Josephus, was a man of eminence in the Jewish state and *a contemporary of Pontius Pilate*;

and the son, in his account of his times, speaks thus of his parent: — "Now, my father Matthias was not only eminent on account of his nobility, but had a higher commendation on account of his righteousness; and was in great reputation in Jerusalem, the greatest city we have." So high-ranking a position he occupied that his son was conferred an appointment as Governor in Galilee. In fact Matthias was connected by family with the High Priesthood of the Hasmonean (Maccabee) line. He lived in the days, as we have said, of Pontius Pilate, and must therefore, according to Apostolic writings, have been a contemporary of Jesus. We must therefore consider him not only a primary witness, but an active participant in those great events which, according to the same authorities, in those days, owing to their marvelous character, *astonished* the Jerusalem world. He must, if their account is correct, have seen or known of the rent in the Temple occasioned by the earthquake which is said to have occurred when Jesus was crucified. He must have known the doctrine of Jesus as taught by himself in his frequent preaching both in and out of the Temple. He must have familiarly known those about the Temple whose diseases were miraculously cured by Jesus, and of the thousands who, with more or less of rapt enthusiasm, as these authorities assure us, followed him as "*the desire of all nations*," and of others as "*the consolation of Israel*." His knowledge of the occurrences of the time could not, owing to his position, have been less than that of the common people, not to say the very women and children of the district. Indeed, all the inhabitants of Jerusalem must have either seen or heard of those wonderful miracles which are recorded as the distinctive badge of the Prophet of Nazareth and the pledge of his Messiahship.

Is it credible that the father should have been familiar with all this, and the son know nothing of it? - That this diligent and faithful historian of the period should have been ignorant of what his own father knew as an actual

eye-witness? Or could the father, had he wished, have concealed from the son what was known to the entire generation?

Is it conceivable that the Christian sect could have existed in Judea, and its tenets been embraced by his countrymen, without the knowledge of Josephus, who lived in their midst, and who was precisely of that turn of mind to take the deepest interest in a movement which bore so directly on those very political and religious, as well as philosophical, questions which agitated the time, and which he himself held of such importance as a thinker, a statesman, and a Pharisee?

Let us hear Josephus telling of his turn of mind, his sympathies and thirst for knowledge of all the sects thriving among his countrymen – except, amazingly, the new religion taught by Jesus, of which, however, he says nothing: “I was,” he says, “myself brought up with my brother, whose name was Matthias, for he was my own brother, by both father and mother; and I made mighty proficiency in the improvement of my learning, and appeared to have both a great memory and understanding. Moreover, when I was a child, and about fourteen years of age, I was commended by all for the love I had to learning; on which account the high-priests and principal men of the city came then frequently to me together, in order to know my opinion about the accurate understanding of points of the law. And when I was about sixteen years old, I had a mind to make trial of the several sects that were among us. These sects are three: — the first is that of the Pharisees, the second that of the Sadducees, and the third that of the Essenes, as we have frequently told you; for I thought that by this means I might choose the best, if I were once acquainted with them all; so I contented myself with hard fare, and underwent great difficulties, and went through them all. Nor did I content myself with these trials only; but when I was informed that one whose name was *Banus* lived in

the desert, and used no other clothing than grew upon trees, and had no other food than what grew of its own accord, and bathed himself in cold water frequently, both by night and by day, in order to preserve his chastity, I imitated him in those things and continued with him three years. So when I had accomplished my desires, I returned back to the city, being now nineteen years old, and began to conduct myself according to the rules of the sect of the Pharisees, which is of kin to the sect of the Stoics, as the Greeks call them."

It is not too much to say that Josephus in this gives evidence of a strongly religious turn of mind that, early, led him to investigate minutely the claims and tenets of the separate sects of his day, in order to adapt or adjust himself to the one he might, after conscientious study, find to be the best entitled to his support.

He actually spent three years with this *Banus*, (53-56CE) who looks not unlike John *the Baptizer*, the so-called forerunner and cousin of Jesus. And in all this we see no trace of any dogmatic prejudice. How comes it, then, that he utterly makes no mention in the least of the Christian sect, though what he says was written after the fall of Jerusalem (70CE), long after the recall of Pontius Pilate, under whose procuratorship the chief act in the Christian drama is said to have taken place? Is it rational to suppose that so painstaking an inquirer and accurate a writer, surrounded by the Christian sect too, should never name that sect at all; Can we believe that the Christian sect was in existence at this period at all?

To convince our readers of the desire of this historian to furnish the fullest particulars of all the sects of philosophy that flourished at the period, it will be enough to introduce here an extract or two to the purpose from his works. In Book xviii of the *Antiquities*, chap. I. §§ 2-6, he writes as follows: — "*The Jews had for a great while three sects of philosophy peculiar to themselves;*

the sect of the Essenes and the sect of the Sadducees, and the third sort of opinions was that of those called Pharisees; of which sects, although I have already spoken in the second book of the Jewish War, I will yet a little touch upon them now.

"Now, *for the Pharisees*, they live meanly, and despise delicacies in diet; and they follow the conduct of reason; and what that prescribes to them as good for them, they do; and they think they ought earnestly to strive to observe reason's dictates for practice.

"They also pay a respect to such as are in years; nor are they so bold as to contradict them in anything which they have introduced; and when they determine that all things are done by fate, they do not take away the freedom from men of acting as they think fit; since their notion is, that it hath pleased God to make a temperament whereby what He wills is done, but so that the will of man can act virtuously or viciously. They also believe that souls have an immortal vigor in them, and that under the earth there will be rewards or punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life; and the latter are to be detained in an everlasting prison, but that the former shall have power to revive and live again; on account of which doctrines they are able greatly to persuade the body of the people; and whatsoever they do about divine worship, prayers, and sacrifices, they perform them according to their direction; insomuch that the cities gave great attestations to them on account of their entire virtuous conduct, both in the actions of their lives and their discourses also.

"But *the doctrine of the Sadducees* is this: That souls die with the bodies; nor do they regard the observation of anything besides what the law enjoins them; for they think it an instance of virtue to dispute with those teachers of philosophy whom they frequent. But this doctrine is received only by a few, yet by those still of

the greatest dignity; but they are able to do almost nothing of themselves; for when they become magistrates, as they are unwillingly and by force sometimes obliged to be, they addict themselves to the notions of the Pharisees, because the multitude would not otherwise bear them.

"*The doctrine of the Essenes* is this: That all things are best ascribed to God. They teach the immortality of souls, and esteem that the rewards of righteousness are to be earnestly striven for; and when they send what they have dedicated to God into the Temple, they do not offer sacrifices, because they have more pure lustrations of their own; on which account they are excluded from the common court of the Temple, but offer their sacrifices themselves; yet is their course of life better than that of other men, and they entirely addict themselves to husbandry. It also deserves our admiration, how much they exceed all other men that addict themselves to virtue, and this in righteousness; and indeed to such a degree, that as it had never appeared among any other men, neither Greeks nor barbarians, no, not for a little time; so hath it endured a long while among them. This is demonstrated by that institution of theirs, which will not suffer anything to hinder them from having all things in common; so that a rich man enjoys no more of his own wealth than he who hath nothing at all. There are about four thousand men that live in this way; and neither marry wives nor are desirous to keep servants, as thinking the latter tempts men to be unjust, and the former gives the handle to domestic quarrels; but as they live by themselves, they minister one to another. They also appoint certain stewards to receive the incomes of their revenues, and of the fruits of the ground; such as are good men and priests, who are to get their corn and their food ready for them. They none of them differ from others of the Essenes in their way of living, but do the most resemble those *Dacae* who are called *Polistae* (dwellers in cities).

"*But of the fourth sect of Jewish philosophy* Judas the Galilean was the author. These men agree in all other things with the Pharisaic notions; but they have an inviolable attachment to liberty, and say that God is to be their only ruler and lord. They also do not value dying any kinds of death, nor, indeed, do they heed the deaths of their relations and friends, nor can any such fear make them call any man lord; and since this immovable resolution of theirs is well known to a great many, I shall speak no farther about that matter; nor am I afraid that anything I have said of them should be disbelieved, but rather fear that what I have said is beneath the resolution they show when they undergo pain; and it was in *Gessius Florus's* time [64-66CE] that the nation began to go mad with this distemper, who was our procurator, and who occasioned the Jews to go wild with it by the abuse of his authority, and to make them revolt from the Romans: and these are the sects of Jewish philosophy."

The quotations just made from Josephus clearly establish two historical facts. The first is, that there existed in Judea in the days of Josephus only four religious communities, namely the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes, and the sect founded by Judas the Galilean; each of which is so described as plainly to show that, while the peculiar Christianity of the Church had no existence in any one of them, there is in one or another a greater or lesser approximation to the Christianity that is said, in the New Testament, to have existed in the days of the Apostles: a distinction which it is necessary to draw; for those who now profess the Christian religion do not practice that asceticism to which we call attention as distinguishing alike the practice of the Essenes and that of the new sect which was led by Judas the Galilean. The second fact which these quotations establish is this: That the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and that of reward or punishment in a future world for a virtuous or vicious life in the present, did not originate with Jesus,



and that, if professed by him, as is alleged by the Apostolic writers, they are not originally attributable to him, but must have been simply adopted by him from these sects, and they are not, therefore, as alleged, new divine revelations.

Now, the Apostles are said to have been Galileans, and to have asserted that there was a new sect founded in Galilee by Jesus, while Josephus asserts there was a new sect founded in Galilee by Judas. The only difference in this respect between the two accounts lies in the distinction between the name Judas and the name Jesus, and some commentators deem this distinction so slight as to define the one to be equivalent to the other (see *New Discoveries in the Origin of Christianity* by Emil Walter & *Le Mensonge Chrétien* by Arthur Heulhard, or *The Three Messiahs* by Daniel T. Unterbrink.) If, therefore, we were to affirm the identity of these two, the facts of history might well seem to warrant the deduction; for Josephus, as we have seen, mentions only one new sect as having arisen in his day, and if Judas and Jesus are not the same, it would be necessary to conclude that there were either two founders of the one new sect, or else two new sects, contrary to the express testimony of his contemporary evidence.

In any case, there is clear evidence of the truth of Josephus' version, that there were four philosophical sects only, — one of which, as is explained by him, was of recent origin, and founded by Judas of Galilee; that the Christian sect, as such, was not only not recognized at the time, but that it did not exist until a later period; and that it was not till a much later period that the so-called Gospel and Apostolic accounts were written and received as genuine tradition.

It would then appear that those who committed them to writing as authentic have put together what they could gather from far and near of memories presumed to refer

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