

IS CHRISTIANITY A FRAUD?  
A Preliminary Assessment of the Conder Thesis  
third edition

By Eric V. Snow

AUTHOR'S PREFACE/ABSTRACT

This essay defends the New Testament as historically accurate, as not being dependent for its doctrinal content on pagan religions and philosophy, and as having properly used the messianic texts of the Old Testament. It attacks Darrell Conder's Mystery Babylon and the Ten Lost Tribes in the End Time, which advocates conversion to some type of Judaism. This document was originally in WordPerfect 5.1 format for Windows 3.1, with elite (12 point) type and six lines of text per vertical inch, with footnotes. I wish to thank John Wheeler, a Global Church of God laymember who can read Hebrew, for his assistance on interpreting the messianic prophecies.

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The New Testament's descriptions of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and his ancestry being from the House of David "were clearly fabulous tales, contrived solely to connect Jesus to that place and family because of a simple misunderstanding by the Gentile forgers of the Gospels."<sup>1</sup> It is claimed that "history clearly tells us is that the Babylonian Mystery Religion is almost identical to Christianity" (MB, p. 47). The old Worldwide Church of God was "not much different from the first century Samaritans whose religion consisted of about one-third 'Judaism,' and two-thirds Mithraism" (MB, p. 47). Taking the wine and bread during the Passover service as symbolic of personally accepting Jesus' sacrifice is as pagan as Easter and Christmas. It should be abandoned as "an abomination before your Creator!" (MB, p. 48). The New Testament writers are guilty of anti-Semitism: "It is an indisputable fact that the two thousand years of Christian persecution against the Tribe of Judah can be laid right at the door step of the Gospels" (MB, p. 59). Jesus is said not to be the promised Messiah, to save the world from its sin:

TO BE BLUNT, THE REASON THE TRUE PROPHECIES OF ISRAEL'S MESSIAH ARE NOT USED IN REFERENCE TO JESUS IS THAT THE NEW TESTAMENT WAS NEVER WRITTEN ABOUT ISRAEL'S MESSIAH. IT WAS WRITTEN ABOUT THE GOD-SAVIOR OF BABYLONIAN MYTHOLOGY! THEREFORE, THE SATAN-INSPIRED NT WRITERS HAD TO LOOK FOR EXCUSES IN OUT-OF-CONTEXT VERSES TO DECEIVE THE LATTER DAY TEN TRIBES OF ISRAEL IN THEIR CONTINUING BAAL WORSHIP! THE GOD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE MESSIAH OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES ARE NOT ONE AND THE SAME, AND THERE IS SIMPLY NO WAY TO MAKE THE TWO RECONCILABLE! (MB, p. 80).

As these statements show, Darrell Conder has converted to some type of Judaism, and he castigates the New Testament (NT) as anti-Semitic, pagan-influenced, historically inaccurate, and full of misused Old Testament (OT) quotes about the Messiah. Below, it shall be maintained that the Conder thesis is false, that the New Testament is historically accurate, that it is not a product of pagan thought but of Messianic Jewish thinking, and that the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament did point to Jesus of Nazareth, crucified in A.D. 31 as the promised Savior of mankind.

USING THE IDEAS OF HIGHER CRITICS AND JEWS, CONDER'S IDEAS AREN'T NEW

Conder launches his attack in three broad areas, which are considered each in turn: (1) Is the NT historically reliable? (2) Was the NT was

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<sup>1</sup>Darrell W. Conder, Mystery Babylon and the Lost Ten Tribes in the End Time (Salt Lake City, UT: Commonwealth Publishing, 1996), p. 113. Below, this work will be referred to as "MB" Footnotes to it are placed internally to the text because of frequent citations made. All emphasis in quotes are original to the work cited, unless otherwise noted, with the exception of Scripture. The time-honored practice of capitalizing the first word of uncapitalized words in quotes has also been followed in some places.

influenced by pagan thought, especially the mystery religions of the Roman Empire such as Mithraism? (3) Did the NT misuse the OT's messianic prophecies? It is very important to realize that most of Conder's ideas are hardly new. Agnostics, atheists, liberal higher critics, and various assorted infidels in the fields of theology and Biblical criticism have long attacked the NT as historically unreliable and (mostly earlier in this century) as influenced by the Mystery Religions and Gnosticism. Conder's originality mainly consists in harnessing various liberal, higher critic works (such as commentaries, encyclopedias, etc.) to the service of Judaism instead of agnosticism or Deism (i.e., unbelief, plain and simple). His attacks on the NT's use of the messianic prophecies largely appear to reflect how Jews in the centuries since the crucifixion have worked hard to evade the fulfillment of the OT Scriptures in Jesus of Nazareth. Because it isn't really new, many traditional Christian works of apologetics deal with the subjects Conder raises. The closest thing to a refutation of Conder written in advance that I know of, and it's highly recommended, is Josh McDowell and Bill Wilson's He Walked Among Us: Evidence for the Historical Jesus (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1993). After reading Mystery Babylon, those afraid Conder may be right should read books by traditional Christians who defend their faith rationally. It is criminally foolish to commit yourself to fundamentally new religious beliefs (not just a mere change in fellowship groups) after listening to just one side that would cost you your eternal life. Jesus made it plain that those who deny Him cannot be saved (Matt. 11:33): "But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven." John made it clear that: "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? . . . Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also" (I John 2:22-23). Conder raises fundamental questions which need answering--his book strikes at the core of Christianity. Unlike the marginalia of church government and the sacred calendar that have distracted the Church of God in recent months, he challenges our deepest held beliefs.

#### CONDER'S VIEWS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT OPENS THE DOORS TO DEISM OR AGNOSTICISM

Before turning to consider historical accuracy of the New Testament, let's investigate the implications of Conder's treatment of the Old Testament. He evidently doesn't fully realize that the way he repudiates the New Testament by citing higher critic scholarship on it means the same can be done with the Old. Right now, the train Conder and his followers are on is (arguably) marked "Judaism." But it would not be surprising to see a few years down the road that locomotive Conder pulling into a station labeled "deism," "agnosticism," or "atheism." What would his followers do then? (Although I have read somewhere in Masada that he has denied this, this suspicion does have a solid foundation, as shown below). In MB he uncritically uses commentaries that employ higher critic theories about the OT without rebuking them. For example, he quotes through another work Olmstead's History of the Persian Empire that says Ezra edited the OT. He then states himself: "Ezra, a descendant of the last high priest of the family Aaron (before the captivity), and a man who had the authority of God to restore the faith of Israel, edited the 'Old' Testament" (MB, p. 9). This claim smacks of standard higher critic theory, in which various anonymous "redactors" (i.e., editors) supposedly assembled in slipshod fashion the Pentateuch and other OT books after the return from the Babylonian Captivity (586 b.c. to 539 b.c.). Scholar Julius Wellhausen, in books published in 1876 and 1878, maintained that the different names used for God ("Elohim" and "Jehovah") showed that different authors wrote different parts of the Pentateuch. The

priestly legislation of the "Elohists" document was largely the work of Ezra. Later editor(s) revised and edited the Pentateuch until it took final shape by about 200 b.c. This whole theory maintains Moses had nothing to do with the first five books of the Old Testament. Called the documentary hypothesis or J E D P theory, it still has enormous influence in the scholarly world as a habit of mind and frame of reference, even with its often-admitted major problems.<sup>2</sup> Then, was the book of Isaiah written by one man (the traditional view) or two or more (the higher critic view)? Conder cites a liberal Catholic work, The Colledgeville Bible Commentary, to deny the traditional Christian interpretation of Isaiah 52-53. "Second Isaiah" is mentioned, yet this draws no criticism from him. (See MB, pp. 98-99).<sup>3</sup> Being liberals in theology, they naturally tend to deny a priori (before further investigation of the facts) the very possibility of successful predictive prophecy in Scripture. Hence, predictions about the Messiah, like predictions about much else, have to be "explained away," in order to fit a naturalistic paradigm (i.e., a world without God, or without One who intervenes). Conder doesn't realize he is implicitly relying on their fundamentally agnostic or deistic premises when using their arguments against the messianic prophecies being fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

#### THE BOOK OF DANIEL ATTACKED?!

Conder assaults the book of Daniel almost as harshly as any part of the NT. Undeniably, Conder takes comfort from the supposed "overwhelming evidence about Daniel's composition [such] that many biblical scholars have ceased to try and make any of it [the seventy weeks prophecy] fit a prophecy of Jesus" (MB, p. 128). Evidently because the Seventy Weeks prophecy points to the Messiah's arrival by A.D. 100, he virtually attempts to read Daniel out of the Hebrew canon. To undermine faith in it, he cites a slew of works influenced by higher critic theories of its late date and authorship. He uses the Catholic Encyclopedia and Asimov--a science/science fiction writer and outright atheist--who willingly place a second century (c. 165 b.c.) completion date on it.<sup>4</sup> He says Daniel "was not holding up to historical

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<sup>2</sup>A good capsule summary in is Josh McDowell, ed., More Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidences for the Christian Scriptures, rev. ed. (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1981), p. 45. A powerful, recent critique of the documentary hypothesis is: Duane Garrett, Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991). More briefly, see Gleason Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), pp. 45-54.

<sup>3</sup>For a brief but solid defense of the unity of Isaiah's authorship, see Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, pp. 263-266.

<sup>4</sup>Asimov has said in print he was an agnostic, but he finally admitted to his atheism thus: "Emotionally I am an atheist. I don't have the evidence to prove that God doesn't exist, but I so strongly suspect he doesn't that I don't want to waste my time." Isaac Asimov in Paul Kurtz, ed., "An Interview with Isaac Asimov on Science and the Bible," Free Inquiry 2 (spring 1982): 9, cited by Henry Morris, The Biblical Basis for Modern Science (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 106. Conder's use of Asimov's commentary on the Bible illustrates the slipshod scholarship that characterizes Mystery Babylon. He does not cite "big names" in liberal scholarship, such as Bultmann, but uses such works as encyclopedias, showing he is largely getting

scrutiny" and contains an "unhistorical mention of Darius the Mede." (MB, pp. 124-125). Conder somehow thinks that because the Jews put the book of Daniel in the Writings instead of the Prophets that it need not be regarded as the infallible, inerrant Word of God. This is simply false. If it's in the Hebrew canon, which is the same for Protestant Christians as it is for the Jews, then it is infallible and without error (in the original writing, or autograph) regardless of the order the Jews (or anybody else) arranged their Bibles (the Tanakh) in. The book of Daniel is clearly prophetic: "But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time; many will go back and forth; and knowledge will increase. . . . And he [the angel] said, 'Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time" (Dan. 12:4, 9). Daniel is one of the best proofs of the Bible's inspiration, due to its detailed predictions of Middle East history. Consider, for example, the long prophecy of Dan. 11, which is an overview of the struggles between the Greek Seleucid (Syria/Mesopotamia) and Ptolemaic (Egypt) dynasties after Alexander the Great's death caused his generals to divide up his empire four ways. As a result, since various liberal higher critics cannot believe in successful predictive prophecy, because it would prove the Bible was inspired by an Almighty God, they "backdate" books such as Daniel to avoid the ominous implications of fulfilled prophecy. Hence, higher critics say Daniel "had" to be written by or around 165 b.c., not by about 530 b.c., when Daniel himself was alive. However, this book's vocabulary and language decisively refutes such a late date. Since languages change over time, this allows scholars roughly to date the book, especially by comparing it with the Dead Sea Scrolls. It lacks Greek loan words (outside of ones universally used for musical instruments), which points to a time before the Greek conquest of Persia under Alexander the Great (c. 336 to 324 b.c.) It also places the verb late in clauses, unlike the Jewish Targumic and Talmudic literature written around during the second century b.c. or later. Based on linguistic reasons alone, the book of Daniel could not have been written later than the fifth or late sixth century b.c.<sup>5</sup> Conder's basic error here, similar to what he does with the NT, is to cite uncritically the ideas of liberal higher critics about the Bible, discount conservative Christian scholarship, and also (presumably) ignore what these same higher critics have to say about the Old Testament, which would destroy whatever faith someone would have in the Holy Scriptures. So now--why pick and choose? Suppose I cited Asimov or the Collegville Bible Commentary when (presumably) they said something

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the liberal, higher critic scholarship second hand. Many of the secondary sources he uses, such as Doane and Walker, clearly appear to manifest outright hostility towards Christianity. When citing the legends of the Mystery Religions of the Roman Empire, their bias surely distorts the myths in question towards looking more like Christian teaching and history than they really were, thus misleading Conder into reaching the same conclusions as theirs. Drinking from such poisoned wells leads to poisoned results, especially when (judging from his footnotes) standard conservative Christian scholarship has hardly been consulted or refuted. (While he has said in Masada that he has done this, he needs to freely cite and then refute it).

<sup>5</sup>Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, pp. 282-284. He refers to more technical works, such as his own Survey of Old Testament Introduction, for those who know Hebrew and Aramaic, and want the specific details. In his Encyclopedia (284-285, 286-289), he does deal with objections to Daniel's historicity, such as the identity of "Darius the Mede" and what date Nebuchadnezzar first invaded Judea.

critical about the OT as being uninspired, unhistorical, etc. Should that destroy someone else's faith in the OT? Yet Conder routinely cites works which are (presumably) as skeptical of the OT as of the NT, yet he only uses the parts that attack the NT (including the NT's use of the OT). He cites the parts suited to his thesis of converting to some type of Judaism ("the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob"), while ignoring the material detrimental to his purposes. His treatment of the book of Daniel is ominous--it means he may well be on the road to deism or agnosticism, with Judaism being a mere pit stop.

## 1. THE HISTORICITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT DEFENDED

To survey Conder's charges more systematically, first let's consider his arguments against the New Testament being inspired by God, historically reliable, and accurately preserved by scribes through the centuries. Suppose we are raised knowing nothing about the Bible, OT or NT, like some tribe in the jungles of New Guinea or in Brazil near the Amazon. One day, a missionary comes along, and drops on us a copy of the Bible in our own language, and we are literate enough to read it. How could we judge whether its contents are reliable? Suppose some other missionary left a Quran (Koran) behind. How could we judge whether that book was reliable? To be rational in our religious beliefs, instead of just blindly following what our parents believe, we need to take the same approach HWA himself did, and prove God to exist, and the Bible to be the word of God.<sup>6</sup> Fulfilled prophecy, in which the Bible predicts something and it occurs before God judges humanity, is one of the strongest proofs of the Bible's inspiration. Christ's predictions of the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple are in this category (Matt. 24:2-3; Luke 21:5-6, 20-24). Concerning the trustworthiness of the New Testament in particular, how can its claims be analyzed, especially in comparison with (say) the Quran? The military historian C. Sanders developed three ways of evaluating the trustworthiness of any document historically: (1) the bibliographical test (2) the internal evidence test (3) the external evidence test. The bibliographical test maintains that the more handwritten manuscript copies there are of an ancient historical document, the more reliable it is. Also, the closer in time the oldest presently existing manuscript that has survived is to the original first copy (autograph) of the author, the more reliable that document is. There is less time for distortions to creep into the text by scribes down through the generations copying by hand (before Gutenberg's perfection of printing using moveable type by c. 1440). The internal evidence test involves analyzing the document itself for contradictions and self-evident absurdities. How close in time and place the writer of the document was to the events and people he describes is examined: The bigger the gap, the less likely it is reliable. The external evidence test checks the document's reliability by comparing it to other documents on the same subjects, seeing whether its claims are different from theirs. Archeological evidence also figures into this test, since many Biblical sites and people can be confirmed by what archeologists have dug up in the Middle East. How does the New Testament stack up under these tests? Let's check it out, referring to some of Conder's attacks on it in the process.

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<sup>6</sup>Herbert W. Armstrong, Mystery of the Ages (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1985), pp. 21-22; Herbert W. Armstrong, The Bible Superstition or Authority? . . . and Can You Prove It? (1985), pp. 1-2.



## THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL TEST AS APPLIED TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

By the two parts of the bibliographical test, the NT is the best attested ancient historical writing. Some 24,633 known copies (including fragments, lectionaries, etc.) exist of it, with 5309 of these being in Greek. By contrast, the document with the next highest number of copies outside the Hebrew Old Testament [OT] (which has over 1700 copies) is Homer's Illiad, with 643. Other historical writings by prominent ancient historians have far fewer copies: Thucycides, History of the Peloponnesian War, 8; Herodotus, The Histories, 8; Julius Caesar, Gallic Wars, 10; Livy, History from the Founding of the City, 20; Suetonius, Lives of the Caesars, 8. Conder is fond of citing Tacitus's statement about Jesus Christ being crucified (for example, MB, p. 53). For the Annals of Tacitus, there are, at the most, 20 surviving manuscript (ms) copies of it, while only one (!) endured of his minor works. Conder mistakenly implies the large number of manuscripts is a reason for disbelief in the NT by citing the 1908-12 Catholic Encyclopedia, which says "the greatest difficulty confronting the editor of the New Testament is the endless variety of the documents at his disposal." Conder then comments, after it cites a figure of 2,328 [Greek?] manuscripts (mss) and 30 more recent discoveries: "This article was written about 1908, which should tell the reader how many more mss. have been brought to light in the eighty-five plus year interval!" He goes on to say that "there were thousands of these manuscripts and they were by no means consistent with each other. In other words, the texts had tens of thousands of errors in them. The only solution was to 'reconstruct' a new Greek version of the Christian Bible" (MB, p. 15, fn. 34; p. 16). Conder's charge ignores how more manuscript evidence there is, the easier it becomes to catch any errors that occurred by comparing them with one another. As F.F. Bruce observed:

Fortunately, if the great number of mss increases the number of scribal errors, it increases proportionately the means of correcting such errors, so that the margin of doubt left in the process of recovering the exact original wording is not so large as might be feared. The variant readings about which any doubt remains among textual critics of the New Testament affect no material question of historic fact or of Christian faith and practice.<sup>7</sup>

Having over 5300 Greek mss. to work with, it becomes much easier to detect scribal errors in the NT than by comparing with one another the (say) ten copies of Caesar's Gallic Wars, long a standard work of Latin teachers to use with beginning students. The science of textual criticism has an embarrassment--of riches--when it comes to the NT.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Josh McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1 (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1979), pp. 39-43; F.F. Bruce, The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?, fifth ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1960), pp. 19-20.

<sup>8</sup>Conder may be implicitly building upon average people's skepticism of ancient texts here, forgetting a real science of textual criticism does exist, and is used in analyzing documents that aren't sacred in origin. See C.S. Lewis, God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), p. 95.

## HOW CAN YOU KNOW WHETHER THE NEW TESTAMENT IS A FIRST-CENTURY DOCUMENT?

Conder argues that the New Testament is not primarily a first-century document:

This is not to say that some details of Jesus' life and those of his disciples weren't written down in the first century. . . . What such independent testimony tells us is that scraps of original writings were collected, placed with the sayings of Jesus (which will be discussed later) and this formed the first 'New Testament.' It is now generally agreed upon [by higher critics!--EVS] that there was no Gospel account such as we know it today in the first century C.E. . . . Prior to the Gospel of Mark, it is agreed by the [higher critic!--EVS] experts . . . that the only Christian writings circulating in the first few centuries were the sayings of Jesus. . . . Many encyclopedias will point out that after a few generations the sayings of Jesus, which were devoid of any details of his life, were not sufficient to satisfy the curiosity of the increasing membership of the Christian Church. (MB, pp. 14, 21).

He maintains the Gnostic Nag Hammadi manuscripts (found in 1947) is a translation of a second-century original in Greek, which makes it "in certain respects . . . the oldest known ms. of the NT in existence." (MB, p. 22). Later he says that gentile converts later rewrote and added to the Gospels during the first two or three centuries after Jesus' death, so that the NT was nothing like what exists today until many, many decades after 100 A.D. Oral traditions about the life of Jesus were passed down over several generations before being written down, causing many inaccuracies from what really happened to be found in the Gospels. The descriptions surrounding Jesus' birth were "never a part of the earliest writings of the Christian Church" (MB, pp. 21-22, 26, 29). So now--if the NT wasn't written down fully until one or more centuries after Jesus died, then belief in its historical accuracy is logically undermined.

## SCHOLARS MOVE AWAY FROM A SECOND-CENTURY DATE FOR THE NEW TESTAMENT

Recently among scholars there has been a move away from a second-century composition date for the New Testament. For example, Biblical archeologist William Foxwell Albright once remarked: "In my opinion, every book of the New Testament was written by a baptized Jew [Luke presumably would be an exception--EVS] between the forties and eighties of the first century A.D. (very probably sometime between about A.D. 50 and 75)." Elsewhere he stated: "Thanks to the Qumran discoveries [meaning, the Dead Sea Scrolls], the New Testament proves to be in fact what it was formerly believed to be: the teaching of Christ and his immediate followers between cir. 25 and cir. 80 A.D." Scholar John A.T. Robertson (in Redating the New Testament) maintains that every New Testament book was written before 70 A.D., including even John and Revelation. He argues that no New Testament book mentions the actual destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. by Rome, it must have been all written before that date. If the New Testament is a product of the first century, within one or two generations of Jesus' crucifixion, worries about the possible inaccuracies of oral transmission (people telling each other stories about Jesus between generations) are unjustified. As scholar Simon Kistemaker writes:

Normally, the accumulation of folklore among people of primitive culture takes many generations: it is a gradual process spread over centuries of time. But in conformity with the thinking of the form critic [a school of higher criticism that studies how oral transmission shaped the present organization of the New Testament], we must conclude that the Gospel stories were produced and collected within little more than one generation.

#### HOW PEOPLE IN CULTURES MORE DEPENDENT ON ORAL TRADITION HAVE BETTER MEMORIES

In cultures where the written word and literacy are scarce commodities, where very few people able to read or afford to own any books, they develop much better memories about what they are told, unlike people in America and other Western countries today. For example, Alex Haley (the author of Roots) was able to travel to Africa, and hear a man in his ancestor's African tribe, whose job was to memorize his people's past, mention his ancestor Kunta Kinte's disappearance. In the Jewish culture in which Jesus and His disciples moved, the students of a rabbi had to memorize his words. Hence, Mishna, Aboth, ii, 8 reads: "A good pupil was like a plastered cistern that loses not a drop." The present-day Uppsala school of Harald Riesenfeld and Birger Gerhardsson analyzes Jesus' relationship with His disciples in the context of Jewish rabbinical practices of c. 200 A.D. Jesus, in the role of the authoritative teacher or rabbi, trained his disciples to believe in and remember His teachings. Because their culture was so strongly oriented towards oral transmission of knowledge, they could memorize amazing amounts of material by today's standards. The values of this culture emphasized the need to remember their teacher's teachings and deeds accurately, then to pass on this (now) tradition faithfully and as unaltered as possible to disciples made in the future. Paul's language in I Cor. 15:3-8 reflects this ethos, especially in verse 3: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures . . ." Correspondingly, the apostles were seen as having authority due to being eyewitness guardians of the tradition since they knew their Teacher well (cf. the criterion for choosing an apostle listed in Acts 1:21-22; cf. I Cor. 9:1). Furthermore, the words of Jesus were recorded within a few decades of His death while eyewitnesses, both friendly and hostile, still lived. These could easily publicly challenge any inaccuracies in circulation. Scholar Laurence McGinley writes that: "The fact that the whole process took less than thirty years, and that its essential part was accomplished in a decade and a half, finds no parallel in any [oral] tradition to which the Synoptic Gospels [Mark, Luke, and Matthew] have been compared."

#### HOW THE BOOK OF ACTS IMPLIES THE NEW TESTAMENT WAS WRITTEN BEFORE C. 63 A.D.

A very straightforward argument for the date of the New Testament can be derived from the contents of the book of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts). The Gospel of Luke and Acts were originally one book, later divided into two. As a result, Luke was necessarily written a bit earlier than Acts. In turn, Luke is traditionally seen as having depended upon Mark over and above his own sources, so Mark was necessarily written still earlier. Furthermore, Matthew is normally seen as having been written after Mark but before Luke. Hence, if a firm date can be given to Acts, all of the Synoptic Gospels (Mark, Luke, and Matthew) had to have been composed still earlier. There are six good reasons to date Acts as being written by c. 63 A.D. First, Acts doesn't mention the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., despite much of its action focuses in and around

that city. Only if it was written earlier does the omission of this incredibly disruptive event in the Holy Land make sense. Second, Nero's persecutions of the mid-60's aren't covered. Luke's general tone towards the Roman government was peaceful and calm, which wouldn't fit if Rome had just launched a major persecution campaign against the church. (The later Book of Revelation has a very different spirit on this score, even if it is in symbolic prophetic code, since the Beast was Rome). Third, the martyrdoms of James (61 A.D.) as well as Paul and Peter (mid-60s A.D.) aren't mentioned in Acts. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus does record the death of James, so this event can be easily dated. Since these three men are leading figures in the Book of Acts, it would be curious to omit how they died, yet include the martyrdoms of other Christians like Stephen and James the brother of John. Fourth, the key conflicts and issues raised in the church it records make sense in the context of a mainly Jewish Messianic Church centered on Jerusalem before 70 A.D. It describes disputes over circumcision and admitting the gentiles into the church as having God's favor, the division between Palestinian and Hellenistic Jews (Acts 6:1), and the Holy Spirit falling on different ethnic groups (Jews followed by gentiles). These issues had a much lower priority after 70 A.D. than before. The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. basically wiped out Jewish Christianity as a strong organized movement. Fifth, some of the phrases used in Acts are primitive and very early, such as "the Son of man," "the Servant of God" (to refer to Jesus), "the first day of the week," and "the people" (to refer to Jews). After 70 A.D., these expressions would need explanation, but before then they didn't in the Messianic Jewish Christian community. Finally, of course, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. isn't referred to in Acts despite its apocryphal effects on the Christian community. Since in his Gospel Luke himself relates Jesus' predictions of Jerusalem's destruction in the Mount Olivet Prophecy (chapter 21), it's hard to believe he would overlook its fulfillment if he had written Acts after 70 A.D. Hence, judging from what the author included as important historically, if Acts was written about c. 63 A.D., the Gospel of Luke would be slightly older, and correspondingly Matthew and Mark probably should be dated to the mid-40s to mid-50s A.D.<sup>9</sup> Paul's letters have to be older than Acts as well.

#### THE NEW TESTAMENT WASN'T SUBJECT TO A LONG PERIOD OF ORAL TRADITION

Several reasons indicate that the New Testament wasn't subject to a long period of oral tradition, of people retelling each other stories over the generations. Let's assume the document scholars call "Q" did exist, which they say Matthew and Luke relied upon to write their Gospels. If "Q" can be dated to around 50 A.D. after Jesus's death in 31 A.D., little time remains in between for distortions to creep in due to failed memory. Furthermore, the sayings of Jesus found in the Gospels were in an easily memorizable, often poetic form in the original Aramaic. Since Paul was taken captive about 58 A.D., the way he wrote to the Romans, Corinthians, Thessalonians, and Galatians indicates that he assumed they already had a detailed knowledge of Jesus. He almost never quotes Jesus' words in them (besides in I Cor. 11:24-25). Hence, as James Martin commented:

As a matter of fact, there was no time for the Gospel story of Jesus to have been produced by legendary accretion. The growth of

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<sup>9</sup>J.P. Moreland, Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Co., 1987), pp. 152-54.

legend is always a slow and gradual thing. But in this instance the story of Jesus was being proclaimed, substantially as the Gospels now record it, simultaneously with the beginning of the Church.

J. Warwick Montgomery remarked that form criticism [a school of higher criticism] fails because "the time interval between the writing of the New Testament documents as we have them and the events of Jesus' life which they record is too brief to allow for communal redaction [editing] by the Church."

Anderson adds, in a statement that must be reckoned with by Conder and his followers:

What is beyond dispute is that every attempt to date the Gospels late in the first century has now definitely failed, crushed under the weight of convincing evidence. If the majority of the five hundred witnesses to the resurrection were still alive around AD 55 . . . then our Gospels must have begun to appear when many who had seen and heard the earthly Jesus--including some of the apostles--were still available to confirm or question the traditions.<sup>10</sup>

Claims that the NT wasn't finished being written by c. 100 A.D. are simply untenable.

THE NT HAS A SHORTER GAP BETWEEN ITS ORIGINAL WRITING AND OLDEST EXTANT COPIES

Dates that turn the NT into a second-century document have been increasingly discredited by scholars in recent decades. This development makes the time gap between the earliest preserved copies and the autograph, or first manuscript, much smaller for the NT than the pagan historical works cited above. William Foxwell Albright has commented: "We can already say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after about A.D. 80, two full generations before the date[s] between 130 and 150 given by the more radical New Testament critics of today."<sup>11</sup> For the NT, the gap between its original copies (autographs) and

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<sup>10</sup>William Foxwell Albright, Christianity Today, Jan. 18, 1963; William Foxwell Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1946), p. 23; John A. Robinson, Redating the New Testament (London: SCM Press, 1976); as cited in McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, pp. 62-63; R.T. France, The Evidence for Jesus (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), pp. 119-20; Simon Kistemaker, The Gospels in Current Study (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), as cited by Josh McDowell, More Evidence, p. 210; Laurence J. McGinley, Form Criticism of the Synoptic Healing Narratives (Woodstock, MD: Woodstock College Press, 1944), p. 25, as cited by McDowell, More Evidence, p. 211; James Martin, The Reliability of the Gospels (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1959), p. 103-104, as cited by McDowell, More Evidence, p. 212; John Warwick Montgomery, History and Christianity (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1964), p. 37 as quoted in McDowell, More Evidence, p. 213; Norman Anderson, Jesus Christ: The Witness of History (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), p. 31.

<sup>11</sup>William F. Albright, Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1955), p. 136; as cited by McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, pp. 62-63.

the first preserved mss. is about 90 years or less, since most of it was first written before 70 A.D., and fragments show up shortly thereafter. One fragment of John, dated to 125 A.D., was in the past cited as the earliest copy known of any part of the NT. But in 1972, nine fragments of the NT were found in a cave by the Dead Sea. Among these fragments, part of Mark was dated to around 50 A.D., Luke 57 A.D., and Acts from 66 A.D. Hence, Conder is relying on outdated scholarship when he writes that "the earliest known fragments of the NT . . . date from the second century C.E. [A.D.]" (MB, p. 11). The earliest major manuscripts, such as Vaticanus and Sinaiticus are dated to 325-50 A.D. and 350 A.D. respectively. By contrast, the time gap is much larger for the pagan works mentioned above. For Homer, the gap is 500 years (900 b.c. for the original writing, 400 b.c. for the first copy), Caesar, it's 900-1000 years (c. 100-44 b.c. to 900 A.D.), Herodotus, 1300 years (c. 480-425 b.c. to 900 A.D.) and Thucycides, 1300 years (c. 400 b.c. to 900 A.D.).<sup>12</sup> For the OT, even with the Dead Sea Scroll discoveries, the gap for the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) is still around 1300 years or more. (These discoveries still demonstrate faith in its accurate transmission is rational, since few mistakes crept in between about 100 b.c. and c. 900 A.D. for the book of Isaiah). Hence, the NT can be objectively judged more reliable than these pagan historical works both by having a much smaller time gap between when it was written and the first preserved copies, and in the number of ancient handwritten copies. While the earliest mss. have a different text type from the bulk of later ones that have been preserved, their witness is still powerful for the NT's preservation since these variations compose a relatively small percent of its text.

#### SOME PROBLEMS WITH FORM CRITICISM, WHICH CONDER IMPLICITLY USES

Form Critics maintain the early church had little or no biographical interest in recording the details of Jesus' life, but was interested mainly in his sayings for the purposes of preaching, a view Conder harnesses for his purposes. First, in reply, these critics are evidently using a limited definition of "biography." Analyses by Stanton and Gundry show the Gospels were similar enough to Hellenistic (the ancient Greek world's) biographies so they can be included in that category. The manner in which Mark, for example, recorded the names of many individuals and specific geographical locations shows he wasn't creating a legend, myth, or literary piece, but "drew from a living tradition." Mark didn't note that Pilate was the Procurator of Judea, which was a particular matter of historical knowledge. Instead, he emphasized Pilate's belief that Jesus was innocent while on trial before him--a point of biographical interest, not general historical interest.

But the Christian tradition which St. Mark followed had a vivid biographical memory. It told that Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus, had borne the cross of Jesus, and it recorded the names of three of the women who saw Jesus die--Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the less, and Salome.

Furthermore, why did supposedly the Church after the first generation suddenly develop such an interest in biographical details about Jesus' life, but lacked

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<sup>12</sup>See Robert A. Morey, The New Atheism and the Erosion of Freedom (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1986), p. 112. He cites in turn David Estrada and William White Jr., The First New Testament (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978); McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, pp. 42-43.

this earlier on? After all, if they had the typical pagan mentality, in which myths were fine, and actual historical events were unimportant in religious affairs, why did this abruptly change later on? As Manson noted:

But if the outline [the basic chronology of Jesus' life as found in the Gospels] had then to be created ad hoc [by improvisation], it can only be that for the thirty years between the end of the Ministry and the production of Mark, Christians in general were not interested in the story of the Ministry and allowed it to be forgotten. One would like to know why the first generation were not interested while the second generation demanded a continuous narrative [my emphasis here--EVS]. More than that, we need some explanation why it was possible for the details of the story [which would include what He said] to be remembered and the general outline forgotten. It is not the normal way of remembering important periods in our experience.<sup>13</sup>

Human nature is more consistent than this, which makes the notion that later Christians would be more interested in details of Jesus' life than earlier ones patently absurd.

#### THE NEW TESTAMENT'S EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY UNDERMINES THE FORM CRITICS' ARGUMENTS

Form Critics and other skeptics whom Conder relies upon also ignore how Jesus' followers were eyewitnesses of His life. After his death, they could easily record what they remembered. Some clearly mentioned being eyewitnesses and desiring to accurately preserve what they saw (John 21:24; Heb. 2:3-4; II Pet. 1:16). What attitude could be more contrary to a mythmaker's and more of a historian's than Luke's?

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught. (Acts 1:1-4)

Eyewitness evidence is one of the best reasons for belief in the New Testament's inspiration. As Barnes notes:

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<sup>13</sup>G.N. Stanton in "Ancient Biographical Writing," Jesus of Nazareth in New Testament Preaching--see E.C. Blackman, "Jesus Christ Yesterday: The Historical Basis of the Christian Faith," Canadian Journal of Theology (April 1961), vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 118-27; Stanley N. Gundry, "A Critique of the Fundamental Assumption of Form Criticism, Part I," Bibliotheca Sacra (April 1966), no. 489, pp. 32-39; see also Moreland; W.E. Barnes, Gospel Criticism and Form Criticism (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936); my emphasis, T.W. Manson, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus--Continues," Studies in the Gospels and Epistles, ed. Matthew Black (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1962), as quoted in McDowell, More Evidence, pp. 266-68.

When critics deny the preservation of an 'historical' (or, better, a 'biographical') tradition of the ministry of Jesus, they forget that Jesus had a mother who survived Him, and also devoted followers both women and men. Are we to believe that these stored up no memories of the words (and acts also) of the Master? And the Twelve--though they often misunderstood Him, would they not preserve among themselves either by happy recollection or by eager discussion many of his startling sayings and of His unexpected deeds?

Not only did friendly disciples bear witness to Jesus' doings. Many hostile witnesses lived among the Jews who surely wished to pounce on anything that could possibly be used against Christianity or its Founder. Then were the details added as oral transmission about Jesus' life proceeded down the generations? This claim against studies that show that stories when continually retold they become simpler, shorter, and increasingly omit specific details such as place names. For example, E.L. Abel observes: "Contrary to the conclusions derived from Form Criticism, studies of rumor transmission indicate that as information is transmitted, the general form or outline of a story remains intact, but fewer words and fewer original details are preserved."<sup>14</sup> Once the NT is seen as a document by eyewitnesses, or could be easily critiqued by such, Conder's attack on its reliability takes a major nose dive.

#### WHY SHOULD THIS EYEWITNESS EVIDENCE BE BELIEVED?

There are special reasons for believing in the reliability of the New Testament authors. A document is more apt to be reliable when it is a personal letter, was intended for a small audience, was written in a rough, unpolished literary style, and contains rather irrelevant information such as lists of details such as the names of individuals. Although a document can lack these characteristics and still be sound historically, they still remain prima facie powerful points in favor of a document being accurate when its origin is unclear. When something is written for propagandistic efforts among a vast audience, it's more likely to shade the truth or omit inconvenient, embarrassing facts. Now much of the New Testament is made up of letters intended for small churches or individuals, especially Paul's, which sometimes reflect rather hurried writing (consider I Corinthians and Galatians, both of which are pervaded by a crisis atmosphere). Mostly written in the rough koine Greek of average people, it contains inconsequential details even in the Gospels which were intended for a broad audience (see John 21:2, 11; Mark 14:51-52). The Letter (epistle) to the Romans's sixteenth chapter is largely taken up with Paul's greetings and instructions to various individuals. Furthermore, eyewitnesses who have much to lose and little to gain from telling what they saw are reliable. The Jewish Christians of the first

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<sup>14</sup>Barnes, Gospel Criticism, pp. 15 and/or 16; E.L. Abel, "Psychology of Memory and Rumor Transmission and Their Bearing on Theories of Oral Transmission in Early Christianity," Journal of Religion (Oct. 1971), vol. 51, pp. 375-376; as in McDowell, More Evidence, pp. 266, 272. This goes against Form Criticism because it normally maintains the original story was the more simple, not the more complex and detailed, and then details were added by later generations of Christians. In point of fact, the more detailed the account, the more likely it was the original one, based on research by Abel and others on how humans remember things.



century, persecuted by their kinsmen, often paid for their beliefs with their lives. Eleven of the twelve apostles died martyrs' deaths, according to reasonable reliable tradition: How did they benefit materially from proclaiming Jesus as the Jewish Messiah? Paul mentioned the many trials he endured for proclaiming the gospel (II Cor. 11:23-28). If the goal was to make lots of converts to gain lots of money, the apostles could have found easier and safer messages to preach, by changing their beliefs. This Paul refused to do: "But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision [he didn't], why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished" (Gal. 5:11). Being Jews, if they proclaimed falsehoods about God, they had every reason to fear their God's wrath in the hereafter, so they had strong motives for telling the truth about the God they worshiped. Christianity emerged from Judaism's capital, Jerusalem and its vicinity: If the Gospels' portrait of Jesus was seriously wrong, then-living hostile witnesses (which were hardly few in number) could have easily shot it down. Peter and company didn't pack up and go to (say) Athens and start proclaiming the Gospel far away from where anybody could easily check up on their assertions, but started in Jerusalem within weeks of Jesus' death on Pentecost. All in all, these eyewitnesses proclaimed the truth as they knew it, having strong reasons for doing so: Who dies for a lie, knowing that it is a lie?<sup>15</sup>

#### ANCIENT PEOPLE KNEW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRUTH AND FABLES

Some today may believe that the educated people of the ancient world didn't have a real grasp of the difference between the fact of what really happened and telling moral stories to make points. In fact, ancient pagan historians of the West clearly knew the difference, even if they weren't always sufficiently critical of their sources. Herodotus didn't always just believe his sources, and did emphasize the role of eyewitnesses. Although Thucydides presumably did invent most of the speeches found in his history of the Peloponnesian War, he still attempted to have them express the views of the speakers. He never felt free to invent any of the narrative. Lucian believed the historian's only task was to tell the story as it really happened, and Cicero thought similarly. Polybius advocated judging eyewitnesses and analyzing sources. More careful than most, Tacitus did attempt to test his sources and to avoid intentionally distorting what information he had received. The Jewish rabbinical tradition had a similar respect for what had really happened: The duty of the disciples of a rabbi was to pass on accurately what they had learned from their teacher, as described above. Josephus stated his commitment to being accurate and truthful, trying to correct mistaken sources.

A standard higher critic view of the New Testament says the church made up stories about Jesus' life and teachings over the decades after His death because of later controversies it suffered. In fact, much indicates that the words of Jesus were distinct from how His later disciples expressed themselves. Jesus used questions and the Aramaic words "amen" and "abba" in unique ways. Sixty-four times Jesus uses threefold expressions (such as ask, seek, knock). He uses passive verbs when referring to God, such as in this case: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father" (Matt. 11:27). Paul, Peter, etc. did not copy His use of "how much more," "which of you," and "disciple." Often when Jesus' words, as written in Greek, are translated back

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<sup>15</sup>Moreland, Scaling the Secular City, pp. 136-38.

into Aramaic, literary qualities such as parallelism, alliteration, and assonance appear. Greek-speaking gentile disciples could not have fabricated His speeches whole cloth since their poetic quality in Aramaic can't be accidental. Also, if the church had created Jesus' ideas decades later, why is it that "Jesus" never was made to comment on major controversies that struck the church? The Jesus of the Gospels says little or nothing about circumcision, gifts of the Holy Spirit, food laws, baptism, evangelizing the gentiles, rules controlling church meetings, and relations between the church and state. Paul almost never quotes Jesus directly: If he felt free to make up stories about Jesus, he could have easily and directly justified what he did by manufacturing sayings supposedly by Jesus. (Some Muslims through the centuries evidently didn't hesitate to do this for the hadiths (sayings) of Muhammad!, "discovering" quotes convenient for the doctrinal or political controversies of the moment!)

Jesus' life and ideas also had aspects that were problematic, even embarrassing, starting with the deep shame of being executed by crucifixion. (Roman citizens had the right of being beheaded instead!) Facing opposition from within His own family, Jesus was a carpenter, not someone materially rich or powerful. Jesus had views about legalism, divorce, fasting, women, and sinners that certainly presented stumbling blocks to mainstream Jews. Similar to the Old Testament's portrayal of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, David, and Elijah, the New Testament repeatedly and plainly describes the sins and personal flaws of the disciples, such as Peter denying Christ three times and their arguments over who was to be the greatest in the kingdom of God. Surely, if the church concocted the New Testament to spread its message about Jesus, it should have edited out such embarrassing facts about its founders! The New Testament contains too much not fitting a late date for its origination and much of its contents weren't always favorable for promoting the best image of the church's founders and leaders. If you created a historical document to promote your beliefs, you could come up with something more favorable to your cause's leaders than this! These unfavorable aspects found in the New Testament show early Christianity's leaders didn't feel free to rewrite history or ignore historical facts.<sup>16</sup>

#### THE BATTLE BETWEEN THE RECEIVED AND CRITICAL TEXTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Conder also seizes upon the long running dispute between the advocates of the Westcott-Hort/"Critical" (Alexandrine and Western) text and the Received (Byzantine) text in order to undermine general faith in the New Testament, judging from his citations of Robin Fox's The Unauthorized Version and D.A. Waite's Defending the King James Bible (see generally MB, pp. 10-17). By citing those on each extreme of this debate, Conder makes the differences in the NT's Greek manuscripts seem worse than they really are. The "Critical" text basically underlies almost all modern Bible translations, while the Received text underlies the King James Version (KJV) and the New King James Version (NKJV). The basic dispute involves a trade-off of two competing, conflicting claims. On the one hand, there are far more Greek manuscripts that reflect the Received text--approximately 80-90% has this text type, but they are mostly later manuscripts. On the other hand, the earliest major manuscripts, such as Vaticanus and Sinaiticus from the fourth century, reflect the Critical text type, but they are much fewer in number. The biggest differences between the two concern the last twelve verses of Mark (16:9-20)

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<sup>16</sup>Moreland, Scaling the Secular City, pp. 141, 145-47.

and the episode of the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53-11), which the Critical text omits, but the Received text contains. The dispute overall concerns (by McDowell and Stewart's account) 10% of the text,<sup>17</sup> a figure that seems high, judging from some of the statements found below.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the evidence for the omission of the last twelve verses of Mark is actually undermined by the Vaticanus manuscript itself, which is one of the foundational texts for the Critical (Alexandrine) text. It (called "B" by scholars) has a blank column of the right size where the last twelve verses of Mark would have been, which means the original scribe knew something was missing. Catholic Church Fathers before these two manuscripts were copied (c. 350 A.D.) also cited from these last twelve verses, such as Papias, Justin Martyr, Ireneus, and Tertullian, and the early Old Latin and Syriac translations contain them. Altogether, this makes for excellent evidence that Mark originally wrote them since these sources were originally written in the second century, before Vaticanus or Sinaiticus were copied in the fourth.<sup>18</sup> Importantly, the disputed territory (the 10%) can be reduced further when considering the arguments for the Received text's reliability (such as for the last twelve verses of Mark). Argument about 10% of the NT's text should not be a cause for doubting all of it, especially when no major doctrines depend on this controversy's outcome.

#### TEXTUAL CRITICISM CAN ELIMINATE MOST NEW TESTAMENT VARIATIONS

Conder cites Forlong's Encyclopedia of Religion, which mentions that 150,000 variations have been computed to exist among the Greek mss. of the NT (MB, p. 12). Should such a large number of variations make us doubt the reliability of the NT's text? True, since the NT has such a vast number of handwritten copies, a large number of scribal errors are inevitable between all the mss. But this cost is produced from the blessing of having more mss.

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<sup>17</sup>Even they comment that "the same basic story is contained both in the majority text and in the other texts, and that no crucial doctrine of the Christian faith rests upon the 10% that is in dispute." Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, Reasons Skeptics Should Consider Christianity (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1981), p. 48. To gain a feel for the differences involved, you should consult the second apparatus (second set of footnotes) that compares the Received text with the Critical text in this edition of the Greek New Testament: Zane C. Hodges/Arthur L. Farstad, eds., The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text, 2d ed., (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). A casual look at the second apparatus indicates much of this "10%" is composed of switches in order, the substitution of one word for another often similar in form, or the addition or omission of articles and prepositions. By using a Greek/English interlinear in comparison with this Greek NT, you could see what the practical differences are between the two. Using simultaneously two interlinears, one containing the Critical text, such as the Kingdom Interlinear, and another having the Received text, such as Jay P. Green's The Interlinear Bible, would aid in this process for those seriously inclined to pursue it, but who can't read Greek. The Emphatic Diaglott, with its hybrid text and its notes comparing its Greek text with Vaticanus, is also of interest to those wishing to do some amateur textual criticism.

<sup>18</sup>David Otis Fuller, ed., Which Bible? (Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1975), pp. 168, 169. For anyone seeking a solid defense of the Received text, this book is a good place to start.

for it than any other anciently preserved document before the invention of printing and moveable type. As C.F. Sitterly and J.H. Greenlee commented:

Such a wealth of evidence makes it all the more certain that the original words of the NT have been preserved somewhere within the MSS. Conjectural emendation (suggesting a reading that is not found in any MS), to which editors have restored in the restoration of other ancient writings, has almost no place in the textual criticism of the NT. The materials are so abundant that at times the difficulty is to select the correct rendering from a number of variant readings in the MSS.

It is rational to have faith that the scribes preserved the NT accurately because by using the principles of the science of textual criticism most of the variations between manuscripts can be ruled out. Such a flawed text as the Trinitarian interpolation found in I John 5:7 sticks out like a sore thumb because so few Greek mss. contain it (exactly one, from the sixteenth century), and even the earliest copies of the Latin Vulgate don't have it. Furthermore, most of the "200,000 variations" (by another, more recent count) are spelling mistakes, homophones (such as in English, "two," "too," "to"), words accidentally repeated twice by scribes, etc. For example, if the same word is misspelled 3000 times, that counts for 3000 variations. The number of variations that are significant is relatively low. Scholar Ezra Abbott maintained 19/20ths of NT variations have so little support that they can be automatically ruled out. Scholars Geisler and Nix, building upon the work of F.J.A. Hort, said only about 1/8 have weight, with 1/60 being "substantial variations." So ironically, the high number of copies allows more scribal errors to exist, yet provides the antidote for eliminating them: These create a much greater ability to detect and eliminate mistakes, unlike the case for (say) Caesar's Gallic Wars, with its mere 10 copies. Scholar Philip Schaff maintained only 400 of all the 150,000 variations he knew of caused doubt on textual meaning, with 50 being of great significance. Even then, he said no variation altered "an article of faith or a precept of duty which is not abundantly sustained by other and undoubted passages, or by the whole tenor of scripture teaching." A citation of Sir Robert Anderson's found in The Bible and Modern Criticism shows why worries about textual difficulties in the NT are groundless:

All of them face that formidable phantom of textual criticism, with its 120,000 various readings in the New Testament alone, and will enable us to march up to it, and discover that it is empty air; that still we may say with the boldest and acutest of English [textual] critics, Bentley, 'choose (out of the whole MSS) as awkwardly as you will, choose the worst by design out of the whole lump of readings, and not one article of faith or moral precept is either perverted or lost in them. Put them [the different readings] into the hands of a knave or a fool [to choose], and even with the most sinister and absurd choice, he shall not extinguish the light of any one chapter, or so disguise Christianity but that every feature of it will still be the same.'<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>C.F. Sitterly and J.H. Greenlee, "Text and MSS of the NT," Geoffrey W. Bromily, gen. ed., The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), p. 818; Abbott cited in Benjamin B. Warfield, Introduction to Textual Criticism of the New

Conder mistakenly claims that:

This fact notwithstanding, wars have been fought over the meaning of just one particular word in the New Testament [such as which ones?--EVS]. Religious doctrines have been founded on such insignificant words as 'it,' 'a,' or 'the,' which simply means that throughout history men and wom[e]n have died for beliefs that literally have hinged on just a few words in the 'infallible' NT Word of God." (MB, p. 25, see also pp. 17, 18).

Simply put, nothing major is at risk in the debate between the Critical and Received texts. (I think the Received text decisively wins this dispute, which means the real number of variations is far lower than 10%, but that's another story).<sup>20</sup>

#### THE AVERAGE PEOPLE OF JUDEA COULD HAVE KNOWN GREEK

Conder maintains that Jesus' followers during His ministry, the disciples and apostles, were simple folk who couldn't possibly have known Greek:

How were the original apostles able to write in Greek given their background? We are asked to believe, only because the oldest surviving New Testament mss. were written in Greek, that first century Judean fishermen and other such tradesmen could read, write, and speak Greek. In fact, in the case of specific NT books, the Greek is that of someone extremely learned in the language. Needless to say, this assertion doesn't square with the facts and there is a unanimous consensus among most scholars of every denomination that the language of Jesus and his followers was Aramaic. (MB, p. 14)

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Testament, 7th ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), p. 14; Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, A General Introduction to the Bible (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), p. 365; Philip Schaff, Companion to the Greek Testament and the English Version (New York: Macmillan Co., 1952), p. 177, the last three as cited in McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, pp. 43-44; as found in Otis, Which Bible?, p. 119.

<sup>20</sup>Conder can assert that the writings of Paul were likely perverted by Catholic monks, but he has no proof for his assertion (MB, p. 150). After all, for the OT, we don't know how it was preserved during Israel's periods of apostasy, or what the text of the Pentateuch looked like between c. 1450 b.c. and 100 b.c.. Still, we shouldn't doubt that it was accurately preserved due to the influence of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, we shouldn't doubt that the NT was fundamentally accurately preserved between c. 45 A.D., when it was first being written, and c. 350 A.D., when the first major manuscripts appear, which is a much shorter time period. For a general discussion of the principles of textual criticism, but which uses OT examples to illustrate them, see Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, pp. 27-44.

This argument is a major prop for Conder's contention that those who really wrote the Gospels as we have them today were scholarly Catholic monks and/or church fathers of later centuries (see MB, pp. 23-24, 57, 62, fn. 3; 66). However, this claim is simply fallacious. First, it ignores how even though it was written in the Greek, the NT reflects Semitic language patterns, over and above the many scattered Aramaic and Hebrew words found in it. As William Most notes concerning Luke's Gospel:

All scholars know and admit that the Greek of Luke's Gospel shows far more Semitisms than do the Gospels written by Semites. A Semitism consists in bringing some features of Semitic speech or structure into Greek, where it does not really belong. For example, in the parable of the wicked husbandmen, Mark's Gospel is content to merely say that after the first servant was mistreated, the master "sent another," and later again, "he sent another." But Luke 20:9-12 reads oddly, "And he added to send another servant"; and later, he added to send a third." The language sounds stilted in English, and so did it in Greek. The reason is evident. Hebrew, in such a sentence, would use the root ysf, to add. So we can see Luke, who is not a Semite, is taking care to reproduce the precise structure of his source, a Hebrew source, although Mark, who was a Semite, did not do it.

Another example of Luke employing Semitic language patterns was to use "the Hebrew (not Aramaic) construction called apodotic wau (which becomes apodotic kai in Greek, if used." For example, in Luke 5:1, in Most's literal translation, this construction appears: "It happened, when the crowd pressed on Him to hear the word of God, AND He stood by the lake." Inserting that "and" between an opening subordinate clause to connect it with the main clause sounds funny in Greek, as well as English. Luke does this about 20-25% of the time when this could occur, which evidently means he depended on a Hebrew-speaking source that often. He was so careful in using his Hebrew sources, he choose to reproduce literally what are rather clumsy grammatical patterns in Greek! Further proof that the Gospels have a Semitic flavor is found in words that definitely or are likely Aramaic that occur in the Gospels. These include "abba" (father), "talitha cum," (maid arise), "Bar" (son), "perisha" (separated one), "hakil dema" (bloody ground), "shiloha" (Siloam), "reka" ("raca"--silly fool), "kepha" (rock), "toma" (Thomas), and "rabbuni" (rabboni). Even more Hebrew words than Aramaic ones appear in the Gospels. These include "levonah," frankincense, "mammon," money, "moreh," rebel, "bath," a unit of wet measure, "mor," myrrh, "cammon," cummin, "zuneem," tares, "sheekmah," sycamore, "Wai," "Woe!," "amen," "rabbi," "corban," and "Satan." While the routine, everyday language of Jesus and His disciples was most likely Aramaic, this doesn't mean they couldn't have known other languages as well. Increased evidence has come to light in recent years that Hebrew still was a language in common, everyday use in Judea in the time of Roman rule. This has led McDowell and Wilson to say there are "good indications" that Jesus and his disciples were trilingual. Hellenistic influences had penetrated deeply into ancient Judea, and Greek was the lingua franca of the eastern Mediterranean during Roman rule. Much like English has increasingly become late in this century, it was the language of "default" for educated people of different nationalities. They used it to communicate in when encountering each other abroad or in their home territories, when neither knows the native mother tongue of the other. (English is the language for air traffic controllers at major international airports, regardless of their

location or where the jet airliners land or take off). Consider the witness of the ancient Jewish historian Josephus (c. 37-100 A.D.):

I have also taken a great deal of pains to obtain the learning of the Greeks, and understand the elements of the Greek language . . . for our nation does not encourage those who learnt the languages of other nations, and so adorn their discourses with the smoothness of their periods; because they look upon this sort of accomplishment [mastering Greek] as common, not only to all sorts of freemen, but to as many of the servants [slaves?] as pleased to learn them.

Josephus isn't saying that Jews felt learning Greek was confined to the scholarly, but that there was no incentive to learn it as a mark of educational distinction, since many common people could speak it in Judea. Another scholar confirms Josephus's account: "Although the main body of the Jewish people rejected Hellenism and its ways, intercourse with the Greek peoples and the use of the Greek language was by no means eschewed." There is evidence that Jesus himself spoke Greek. For example, in John 21, Jesus used two different words for love, and two different ones for know. Neither of these pairs can be replicated in Aramaic or Hebrew. Nor can the word play on the word for "rock" or "stone" (petros/petra) in Matt. 16:18 be reproduced in these two Semitic languages. He used a diminutive word in the Greek for dogs that were household pets, not strays or wild dogs, when conversing with the gentile Greek-speaking Syrophenician woman in Mark 7:24-28. (This obviously softened His use of a traditional Jewish term of contempt, "dogs," for gentiles).<sup>21</sup> Since it was perfectly plausible that average Jews such as fishermen could speak Greek, then it's no surprise the disciples used it in the NT in order to communicate with others in the wider community of the eastern Mediterranean about Jesus and His teachings.

#### THE NEW TESTAMENT WAS NOT WRITTEN IN A HIGHLY SCHOLARLY GREEK

Conder also misstates how fluent and well done the Greek of the NT was. The NT was basically written in the koine Greek of the average people of the Roman empire, not the classical Greek of the philosophers Plato (c. 428-348 b.c.) and Aristotle (384-322 b.c.), or of Pericles's (c. 495-427 b.c.) Athens. Conder maintains Luke did not write the Gospel named after him, but

it was written much later by another hand. . . . the Greek of this Gospel tells us in no uncertain terms that whoever wrote Luke was very likely a Gentile and not a Jew--which is of no small importance considering that all of the early church fathers wrote

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<sup>21</sup>For the two lists of words, evidence that Jesus could have spoken Greek, and general evidence for the overall Jewishness of the Gospel accounts, see McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 233-61; William G. Most, Catholic Apologetics Today: Answers to Modern Critics Does It Make Sense to Believe? (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1986), pp. 44-47; my emphasis, Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, book 20, chapter 11, section 2; Hellenism (Bentwich, 1919), p. 115, as cited in Aid to Bible Understanding (New York: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1971), p. 693.

and used the kind of polished Greek for which the Gospel of Luke is specifically noted! (MB, p. 14).<sup>22</sup>

Fox, no friend of Christianity, pours cold water on this assertion:

[Paul's] companion, the author of Acts, has also been mistaken for a Hellenistic historian and a man of considerable literary culture; in fact, he has no great acquaintance with literary style, and when he tries to give a speech to a trained pagan orator, he falls away into clumsiness after a few good phrases. His literary gifts lay, rather, with the Greek translation of Scripture, the Septuagint, which he knew in depth and exploited freely: to pagans, its style was impossibly barbarous.<sup>23</sup>

While Luke was humanly capable of writing in a high literary vein at times, such as in the parable of the prodigal son, this didn't mean this was the only way he wrote, or that he could do so consistently. The Holy Spirit allows the different literary styles of different writers to shine through, even as it protects them from writing errors or contradictions. The NT was written so average people could hear the Good News ("Gospel") of Jesus Christ, hence, it was written in the everyday, semi-universal language of the Roman empire, koine Greek, not something highly scholarly or highly literary.<sup>24</sup>

HOW CAN ANYONE BE CERTAIN THAT THE RIGHT BOOKS ARE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

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<sup>22</sup>He elsewhere asserts that because the writers referred to the Jews as a group distinct from themselves that the writers of the Gospels had to be gentiles (see MB, p. 23). This claim ignores how someone who is a "Jew" can be called one because of ethnicity or because of religion. An "atheistic Jew" (re: Karl Marx or Ayn Rand) is not necessarily an oxymoron (self-contradictory phrase). "Jew" in the context of the texts Conder cites (such as Luke 7:3 or John 1:19) refers to non-Messianic Jews, or the practices of traditional Judaism. Christianity, at least prior to 70 A.D., was predominantly made up of Messianic Jews who saw their kinsmen who rejected Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah as the unenlightened, as rivals, sometimes as enemies.

<sup>23</sup>Robin Lane Fox, Pagans and Christians (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1989, p. 305. Please note that Fox is not a Christian.

<sup>24</sup>Aid to Bible Understanding, pp. 693-94. Similarly, Price maintains the weight of the evidence favors seeing Matthew as a Jewish Christian due to his respect for Jewish law [as reflected in the words of Jesus] (Matt. 5:17-20; 24:20; 23:23), his recording that the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat (Matt. 23:2-3), and "his use of rabbinical modes of argumentation from scripture--all of these things, combined with his sharp hostility toward scribes and Pharisees who oppose Jesus (23:13, 29-33), make credible the view that the First Evangelist was formerly a scribe of the sect of the Pharisees [This is admittedly speculative--EVS]. . . . Matthew's universal outlook and undoubted support of the Gentile mission does not obscure his concern to affirm, not reject, his own and others' Jewish past" (James L. Price, The New Testament: Its History and Theology (Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), p. 158). Cf. MB, pp. 23-24



Conder pours launches a major attack on how much faith Christians can have in New Testament's canon, which concerns which books should and shouldn't be in it: "At any rate, among the dozens of Gospels circulating in the first three hundred years of this era, the Catholic Church lighted upon and canonized only four. . . . As to the Gospels themselves, at one time there were 200 different ones circulating in the Christian Church!" (MB, p. 20; cf. p. 149). These statements ignores certain crucial facts. Since the quality of the apocryphal (so-called "missing") books, such as "The Gospel of Peter," "The Gospel of Thomas," and "The Shepherd of Hermas," is so much lower and/or their teachings at such variance with the canonical books, they can be easily dismissed from serious consideration. The Christian community followed implicitly (at least) the procedure of Deut. 13:1-5. This text says that future revelations--here specifically one about following false gods--which contradict earlier revelations are automatically invalid, even when the false prophet in question made some accurate predictions. Those gospels which supported the Gnostic cause, which denied Jesus had a body of flesh and blood before His crucifixion and that the God of the OT was evil and totally different from the NT God, could automatically be eliminated from consideration as heretical. As F.F. Bruce notes:

The gnostic schools lost because they deserved to lose. A comparison of the New Testament writings with the contents of The Nag Hammadi Library [a collection of ancient Gnostic books discovered in 1945 in Egypt] should be instructive, once the novelty of the latter is not allowed to weigh in its favour against the familiarity of the former.

Similarly, James comments: "There is no question of any one's having excluded them from the New Testament: They have done that for themselves." Scholar Milligan remarks: "We have only to compare our New Testament books as a whole with other literature of the kind to realise how wide is the gulf which separates them from it. The uncanonical gospels, it is often said, are in reality the best evidence for the canonical." And Aland maintains: "It cannot be said of a single writing preserved to us from the early period of the church outside the New Testament that it could properly be added today to the Canon." For these reasons it's absurd for Conder to claim that the Gospel of Peter's account of Jesus being resurrected on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread "renders the entire canonized four Gospels void" (MB, p. 149). Instead, the Gospel of Peter is simply false: It is just one document written later than the canonical Gospels, and it contains the false Gnostic/docetic teaching that Jesus did not come in the flesh. The earlier written four Gospels, including Luke whose reliability as a historian has been repeatedly sustained by archeological discoveries, are far more likely to be historically reliable. Their collective witness against this claim should be seen as decisive. Then, in evident reaction against the heretic (and Gnostic) Marcion's (c. 140 A.D.) attempt to edit the canon, lists of the canonical books were made from the late second century onwards. These lists, even from the beginning, contain most of the books found in the NT today. The author of the Muratorian fragment (c. 170 A.D.), Irenaeus (c. 180 A.D.), Clement (c. 190 A.D.), Tertullian (c. 200 A.D.), Origen (c. 230 A.D.), Eusebius (c. 310 A.D.), and Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 348 A.D.) all compiled such lists. Furthermore, Conder labors under a fundamentally false skeptical assumption: The Gospels are not canonical because the church decreed them to be authoritative, but because they are inspired, the church saw them as having authority. So whether a book was written by an apostle (Paul, John, Matthew, James) or someone associated with an apostle (traditionally, Mark was seen as associated with Peter, and

Luke with Paul), was a very heavy weight in indicating what was to be considered Scripture, and what wasn't. Nothing written after c. 100 A.D. made it into the canon--only those books written within a generation or two of Jesus' death were deemed proper to include in the canon. What mattered was apostolic authority, not just authorship. Thus, N.B. Stonehouse has said: "In the Epistles there is consistent recognition that in the church there is only one absolute authority, the authority of the Lord himself. Wherever the apostles speak with authority, they do so as exercising the Lord's authority."<sup>25</sup> The level of skepticism Conder shows about the New Testament canon simply isn't justified.

WAS THE CANON DETERMINED FROM THE TOP-DOWN BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S HIERARCHY?

Conder builds upon the claims of Roman Catholicism that it chose the canon: "The New Testament books found in the present translations were the result of their acceptance by the Roman Catholic Church and its various councils. This is a fact pure and simple, and is easily proven by any biblical encyclopedia or dictionary" (MB, p. 18). In actuality, the Roman Catholic Church's leadership did not choose the canon, and then impose it from the top down. Depending on how "Roman Catholicism" is defined by Conder, this may discount the Greek-speaking eastern churches, many of which (at least in Asia Minor) held onto Sabbatarianism for many years after 100 A.D. It also discounts how God can move men who are not true believers to make the right decisions. (Would God be so careless to let ultimately His holy word become perverted by those with false doctrines? After all, how did He preserve the OT and/or have the right books placed in it when Israel so often had fallen into idolatry as a nation?) Furthermore, the Sunday-observing Church before the time of emperor Constantine and the Edict of Milan (313 A.D.) was hardly a tightly controlled, highly organized, monolithic group. It had suffered terrible persecution itself during the rule of Diocletian (284-305) and earlier emperors. Consider this statement by Jerome (c. 374-419 A.D.), the translator of the Latin Vulgate (at least for the Gospels), as he wrote to Dardanus, the prefect of Gaul. It clearly reflects the lack of top-down uniformity in the Catholic Church on the canon, even in the year 414 A.D., long after the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.):

This must be said to our people, that the epistle which is entitled 'To the Hebrews' is accepted as the apostle Paul's not

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<sup>25</sup>F.F. Bruce, The Canon of Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 277. This book should be consulted by all those with particular concerns on this issue, as well Bruce Metzger's The Canon of the New Testament. M.R. James, The Apocryphal New Testament, p. xii; G. Milligan, The New Testament Documents, p. 228; K. Aland, The Problem of the New Testament Canon, p. 24; as cited in "All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial" (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1963), p. 303; Ned B. Stonehouse, "The Authority of the New Testament," The Infallible Word (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1946), as cited by McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, p. 36. The real parameters of disputes over the canon in the third century concerned a relatively small part of the NT, and none of the Gospels, and it concerned some who doubted this or that book, not huge chunks of the Church. See France, Evidence for Jesus, pp. 123-24. For those interested in briefly surveying the flavor and quality of the apocryphal gospels, see McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 90-105.

only by the churches of the east but by all church writers in the Greek language of earlier times [note that he doesn't consider papal authority or synods of bishops as determinates of the canon's contents!--EVS], although many judge it to be by Barnabas.

It is of no great moment who the author is, since it is the work of a churchman and received recognition day by day in the churches' public reading [again, this clearly denies a top-down approach--EVS]. If the custom of the Latins does not receive it among the canonical scriptures, neither, by the same liberty, do the churches of the Greeks accept John's Apocalypse. Yet we accept them both, not following the custom of the present time [which would deny the binding authority of recent council decisions, such as that of Hippo Regius in 393 and Carthage in 397, or the papal decree of 405--EVS] but the precedent of early writers [notice!], who generally make free use of testimonies from both works.

This statement shows the canon came from the traditional practices of average members and elders--from the bottom up. As scholar Kurt Aland noted: "It goes without saying that the Church, understood as the entire body of believers, created the canon . . . it was not the reverse; it was not imposed from the top, be it by bishops or synods." One major factor in forming the canon was persecution, especially the one unleashed by the Roman emperor Diocletian, which lasted for ten years starting in 303 A.D. (cf. Rev. 2:10). The Roman government for the first time then specifically targeted for destruction all copies of the NT. Believers in the scattered congregations in the Roman empire had to know which religious documents they had they could hand over and which ones they should resist strongly against giving them up, even to death. As Bruce notes, it might be permissible to hand over "a copy of the Shepherd of Hermas or a manual of church order," but not sacred Scripture, if that would satisfy the Roman police for a time. "But for Christians who were ordered to hand over books it must have become important to know which books must on no account be surrendered and those which might reasonably be regarded as 'not worth dying for.'"<sup>26</sup> These practices point to decentralized decision-making for each congregation, or a group of congregations under one bishop, when attacked by the Roman government. This shows papal decrees or synods did not create the canon when they proclaimed its contents in the mid to late fourth century and early fifth centuries. Instead, they merely ratified already existing practice over the centuries and decades by multitudes of laymembers, elders, and church writers scattered within the confines of a vast empire.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Jerome as cited by Bruce, Canon of Scripture, pp. 226-27; Kurt Aland, The Problem of the New Testament Canon, 1962, p. 18, as cited in "All Scripture is Inspired of God and Beneficial", p. 301; Bruce, Canon of Scripture, p. 217; see also McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, p. 37.

<sup>27</sup>See Bruce, New Testament Documents, p. 27. He says it is wrong to think the church's reaction against Marcion's advocacy of a clipped canon (c. 140 A.D.) was the first time the church became serious about formalizing the canon. Instead, the challenge of heresy speeded up the process (Bruce, New Testament Documents, p. 26--compare MB, p. 19, its citation of Legge). Bruce's Canon of Scripture, which surveys the Catholic Church Fathers and others on this subject, makes it painfully evident that the canon was not unilaterally decided top-down by a small group of individuals on top of the Catholic Church's hierarchy.

## THE NATURE OF THE SUNDAY-KEEPING CHURCH BEFORE C. 313 A.D. RECONSIDERED

One of Conder's great fallacies, often repeated in various forms and taken for granted, is the belief that the Catholic Church before the time of Emperor Constantine's proclamation of the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D. (which granted Christianity toleration by the Roman government and relief from persecution) was completely apostate, fully uniform, and monolithic.

It was the Roman Catholic Church that had retained possession of the New Testament Scriptures for the first three hundred years of the Common Era. . . . Now, the fact of the matter is that the Catholic Church, headquartered in Rome, was the supreme ruler of the known Christian world at the time of these councils [that supposedly determined the canon in 382, 393, 397--EVS]" (MB, pp. 9, 20; cf. p. 59).

In fact, the Sunday-keeping church before the Edict of Milan was off and on persecuted by the Roman government, sometimes terribly. The list of persecutions found in Foxe's Book of Martyrs occurring during the years of Roman rule primarily records attacks on Sunday keepers, especially since Sabbatarianism was from the early second century on was mainly concentrated within the Greek-speaking areas of Asia Minor and Greece itself. Ignatius, for example, a staunch Sunday observer of the early second century, was condemned to be eaten by lions. He replied to this sentence: "I am the wheat of Christ: I am going to be ground with the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found pure bread."<sup>28</sup> True, by denying the Sabbath and the festivals such as the Passover these Christians may have sought to avoid being attacked along with the Jews who were victims of Roman anti-Semitism (a type born of paganism, not Christianity). But they still refused to offer pinches of incense to the Roman emperor or to worship any other gods besides the one true God. As a result, the Roman government still sought their lives off and on before 313 A.D. The long-running debate over the nature of Christ as God or being like God shows the Sunday-observing church was hardly uniform in belief.

This debate had begun even before Trinitarianism was first proclaimed at the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.), and it hardly ended then.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, still had competition from the Patriarch of Constantinople (the capital of the Eastern Roman/Byzantine empire) for supremacy within Christendom for many centuries. The Catholic (meaning "universal") Church was hardly tightly united and controlled from the top by a single man, especially when earlier on the patriarchs of Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria had their own spheres of influence as well.

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<sup>28</sup>John Foxe, Foxe's Christian Martyrs of the World (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour and Co., 1985 (1563 original publication), pp. 10-11.

<sup>29</sup>Actually, the nature of the Holy Spirit had not yet been worked out even by the Sunday-keeping church by that time, as shown by how the original Nicene Creed only contains a bare affirmation of belief in the existence of the Holy Spirit, and nothing about it being God or a person. Curiously, and arguably, in so far as it goes, an orthodox member of the old, pre-1986 WCG could affirm this creed! That is, so long as it is not seen as all inclusive, and describing all there is to God's nature (i.e., the "man becomes God" God Family doctrine is omitted from view).

It must be realized that the Catholic church evolved over the centuries, including in its administrative practices. In regard to the Papacy, "The first pope, in the real sense of the word, was Leo I (440-461 A.D.)." Why? Because of the system of church government he set up, or at least systematized by copying the subdivisions and organization of the Roman Empire, during his reign made him so. As Myers saw it: "During the reign of Leo I, the Church set up, within the Roman Empire, an ecclesiastical state [i.e., government] which, in its constitution and its administrative system, was shaping itself upon the imperial model." Furthermore, its degree of apostasy grew as the centuries passed, especially after the pre-313 A.D. persecutions ceased, and compromise with paganism became rampant. For example, the Catholic Church fathers Tertullian (c. 155-after 220 A.D.) and Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-between 211 and 215 A.D.) believed the Second Commandment totally prohibited religious art. Even the church historian Eusebius (c. 327 A.D.) condemned the emperor's sister for asking him to get her a picture of Christ. But what these men believed on this subject was sooner or later rejected. As Ellen White observed:

Now [post-313 A.D.] the church was in fearful peril. Prison, torture, fire, and sword were blessings in comparison with this. Some of the Christians stood firm, declaring that they could make no compromise. . . . Under a cloak of pretended Christianity, Satan was insinuating himself into the church, to corrupt their faith and turn their minds from the word of truth. Most of the Christians at last consented to lower their standard, and a union was formed between Christianity and paganism.

She later gives a list of doctrines that were changed, reflecting the influence of pagan thought and religion. These include the exaltation of the Pope, restrictions on the circulation of the Bible among common people, the changeover to Sunday worship, the immortality of the soul and consciousness while dead, the invocation of saints and the Virgin Mary, purgatory, eternal torment, indulgences, and the replacement of the Lord's Supper by the "idolatrous sacrifice of the mass."<sup>30</sup> These changes did not occur overnight, but reflected a progressive development, as did those that converted pagan celebrations into the holidays of Christmas and Easter. While some changes mainly occurred before 313 A.D., such as the abandonment of the Sabbath for Sunday, and Passover for Easter communion, others clearly occurred later. It is patently absurd to project back the Roman Catholicism of Pope Innocent III (1160-1216), who manhandled European monarchs and nations in the name of God, and its possession of a highly intricate theology in the high Middle Ages, to the first centuries after Christ. Sunday-keeping Christianity before the Edict of Milan in the Roman Empire should never be seen as monolithic,

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<sup>30</sup>Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, vol. 7, p. 629 and Myers' Ancient History, as cited by Herbert W. Armstrong, Who Is the Beast? (1960), pp. 23-24; John Ogwyn, God's Church Through the Ages (San Diego, CA: Global Church of God, 1995), pp. 24-25; Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1971 (1888, original publication), pp. 41, 47-56. Citations of the SDA "prophetess" should not be seen as endorsement by me of her visions as coming from God. For more on the entrance of paganism into Roman Catholicism, see Ralph Edward Woodrow, Babylon Mystery Religion: Ancient and Modern (Riverside, CA: Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, 1966).

uniform, fully apostate, or tightly controlled from the top, yet Conder repeatedly implicitly relies on such a characterization of it, especially when attacking it as bloodthirsty, dishonest, deceitful, highly pagan, etc.

#### HOW OTHER HISTORICAL INFORMATION CONFIRMS THE NEW TESTAMENT

Now let's turn to the external evidence test for the reliability of the New Testament. Being the second of Sanders's approaches to analyzing historical documents, it consists of seeing whether verifiable statements made in some text from the past correlate with other evidence, such as that found by archeology or in other historical writings. Conder claims doing this for the Gospels is difficult: "Perhaps the first thing to notice about the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John is that outside the New Testament itself there is no way to corroborate most of their facts from secular history" (MB, p. 22). This comment ignores how the general cultural background of the Gospel narratives could still be checked, such as place names, customs, governmental procedures, religious rituals, the names of prominent persons, etc. Hence, the Roman government did issue coins with Caesar's head on it called denarii (Matt. 22:17-21), Tiberius was an emperor of Rome (Luke 3:1), the Sanhedrin was the supreme ruling body of the Jews in Judea (Matt. 26:59), footwashing was a lowly task normally done by servants (John 13:12-14), crucifixion was a punishment routinely meted out by the Roman government against non-citizens (Mark 15:24), etc. Archeologists have discovered the pool of Bethesda with five porticoes (John 5:2-4) and the pool of Siloam (John 9:7, 11). The Nazareth stone, discovered in 1878, demonstrates that the place of Christ's childhood did exist. For many centuries no record of the place where Jesus was tried before being crucified, "the Pavement," had been discovered. But Albright found that this court was the court of the Tower of Antonia. It had been the Roman military headquarters in Jerusalem, but was buried when the Emperor Hadrian (76-138, ruled 117-138 A.D.) rebuilt the city.<sup>31</sup> So while most of the specific events recorded in the Gospels can't be directly checked in pagan or Jewish historical works, the general cultural background certainly can be.

More specifically, consider the implications of this evidence for the trustworthiness of the NT. Some doubted Pontius Pilate had ever lived, who had had Jesus crucified in 31 A.D.. He was mentioned only in the NT and by a few other Roman and Jewish sources. But in 1961, an archeological expedition from Italy was digging in the ruins of Caesarea's ancient Roman theater. One workman turned over a stone stairway--and found an inscription to Pontius Pilate on the bottom.<sup>32</sup> This case illustrates and refutes an argument that disbelievers in the Bible use time and time again, which Conder is certainly not above using himself. They argue from silence, and say that because something mentioned in the NT (or OT--what's good for the goose is good for the gander!) is mentioned nowhere else, it can't be true (or certainly true). Archeological discoveries have repeatedly refuted such claims after they were

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<sup>31</sup>Morey, New Atheism, p. 127; William F. Albright, The Archaeology of Palestine, rev. ed (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1960), p. 141; cited in McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, p. 73.

<sup>32</sup>Michael J. Howard, "Unearthing Pontius Pilate," Baltimore Sun, March 24, 1980, pp. B1, B2; as found in Life--How Did It Get Here? By Evolution or by Creation? (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.), pp. 211-12.

made. The NT (and OT) have shown themselves trustworthy so often in what can be checked, it's proper to infer or extrapolate that the rest of what can't be checked is also reliable. This is not a procedure of blind faith.

#### THE RELIABILITY OF LUKE AS A HISTORIAN

What archeological evidence is there for the NT's reliability generally, and Luke's in particular? The English archeologist Sir William Ramsay (professor of humanity at Aberdeen University in Scotland, 1886-1911) had been totally skeptical about the accuracy of the NT, especially the writings of Luke. After going to what is now Turkey, and doing a topographical study, he totally changed his mind. Later, he wrote that Luke "should be placed along with the very greatest of historians." He had believed, as per nineteenth-century German higher criticism, that Acts was written in the second century.

But he found it must have been written earlier, because it reflected conditions typical of the second half of the first century. He explained changing his mind thus:

I may fairly claim to have entered on this investigation without prejudice in favour of the conclusion which I shall now seek to justify to the reader. On the contrary, I began with a mind unfavourable to it, for the ingenuity and apparent completeness of the Tübingen [higher critic] theory had at one time quite convinced me. It did not then lie in my line of life to investigate the subject minutely; but more recently I found myself brought into contact with the Book of Acts as an authority for the topography, antiquities and society of Asia Minor. It was gradually borne upon me that in various details the narrative [of Luke in Acts] showed marvelous truth. In fact, beginning with a fixed idea that the work was essentially a second century composition, and never relying on its evidence as trustworthy for first century conditions, I gradually came to find it a useful ally in some obscure and difficult investigations.

For example, it was said that Luke was wrong to imply the cities of Lystra and Derbe were in Lycaonia and that Iconium wasn't (Luke 14:6), based upon what the Roman politician and orator Cicero (106-43 b.c.) and others had written anciently. But in 1910, Ramsay found a monument that showed Iconium was in Phrygia, not Lycaonia--a discovery since corroborated by further evidence. When Luke said Lysanias was the Tetrarch of Abilene (Luke 3:1), it was said this was incorrect, since the only Lysanias known to ancient historians had died in 36 b.c. But later an inscription found near Damascus, Syria says "Freedman of Lysanias the Tetrarch," and has been dated between 14 and 29 A.D.

The textual critic F.J.A. Fort maintained Luke was wrong to use the Greek word meris to mean "district" when referring to Philippi as part of Macedonia.

Later archeological discoveries have found that Luke was right--this very word meris was employed to describe this district's divisions. Luke called Publius of Malta the "first man of the island" (Acts 28:7); inscriptions have been found that refer to him as "first man." Luke wrote of a riot in Ephesus that took place in its theater. This theater has been excavated, and had room for 25,000 people. The riot had been provoked by the fear that Paul's preaching threatened the silversmiths' trade in objects related to the Temple of Artemis (one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world) . . . One inscription that has been found mentioned that silver statues of Artemis were to be placed in the "theater during a full session of the Ecclesia [assembly]." Luke described once how Paul was nearly killed by a riot

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Without acknowledgement, Conder is employing an argument from silence, which states that since the Jewish historian Josephus (etc.) didn't mention an earlier census under Quirinius, therefore, it didn't exist, and Luke was wrong. Such arguments in the past have been repeatedly exploded by further archeological discoveries, such as "Moses couldn't have written the Pentateuch since writing hadn't been yet invented in his day," or "Belshazzar couldn't have been the last king of Babylon because Herodotus mentions only Nabonidus."

A wait in faith could well solve this problem for us, especially since Luke has been proven right in the past and his critics wrong on various points in the past. In fact, two inscriptions have been discovered that potentially indicate that Quirinius did have an earlier governorship in Syria. The Lapis Venetus describes a census ordered by Quirinius for the Syrian city of Apamea which some evidence says was made sometime between 10-6 b.c., although a number of others maintain it refers to the 6 A.D. census. Another inscription, called the Lapis Tiburtinus mentions someone who had earlier been the proconsul of Cyrene (in modern Libya), who later subdued the Homonadensians, and then "again" received the legateship of Syria and Phoenicia (in modern Lebanon). Since Quirinius is known to have suppressed the Homonadensian tribes for Rome, to have fought in the Gaetulian war in North Africa, and was the governor of Syria (or "the one leading" it), it's sensible to refer this inscription to him. But, alas!, his name is missing from it due to its ill-preserved condition. Admittedly, the word "again" could mean he merely received a legateship a second time, not necessarily in the same locale. Interestingly, scholar E.J. Vardaman maintains he has "micrographic" evidence that conclusively proves this inscription refers to Quirinius which had yet to be published and checked over. Note the potential implication of Luke 2:2 concerning the census it mentions: "This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria." His use of the word "first" may imply there was a second done under his command (compare Acts 5:37, when Luke mentions the census, occurring in 6 A.D., in connection with

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<sup>33</sup>Evidence that Demands a Verdict, pp. 70-73; see also Morey, New Atheism, p. 128.



Judas of Galilee's revolt). Furthermore, Quirinius may have been given some kind of "extraordinary command" or official position in Syria while battling the Homonadensians in Cilicia and elsewhere, but under the authority of Saturninus (the proconsul of Syria from 9 b.c. to 6 b.c.), or Varus, the governor from 7 or 6 b.c. to 4 b.c. Varus was inexperienced and not especially competent (as later shown by the disastrous loss of three legions under his leadership in 9 A.D. in Teutoburger forest in Germany). Augustus Caesar (ruled 27 b.c. to 14 A.D.) may have given Quirinius (who had much experience in the region as a general) an ad hoc commission to conduct the census over the Jews because these encouraged them to revolt, and Herod may have been dragging his feet about doing it. (In such a sensitive position, an experienced Mideast hand would be of value). Archer maintains that the Greek of Luke 2:2 doesn't actually say Quirinius was the governor, but that he "was leading--in charge of--Syria." This would fit the notion that while he was battling the Homonadensian tribes in the mountains of Pisidia between 12 b.c. and 2 b.c. he may have been put in charge of the earlier census (c. 4 b.c.) under the man who officially was the legate or governor. Interestingly, one scholar took a stronger stand on the inscriptions found at Rome and Antioch on this issue: "The scholarly researches of Zumpt (Commentat. epitgraph., II, 86-104: De Syria romana provincia, 97-98) and of Mommsen (Res gestae divi Augusti) place beyond doubt that Quirinius was twice governor of Syria." Ramsay, based on inscriptional evidence, believed Quirinius was a co-governor of Syria 8-6 b.c.<sup>34</sup> The dictum of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 b.c.) was that the benefit of the doubt should give given to the author, and not arrogated to the critic himself, a procedure Conder rarely respects concerning the NT. This approach is justifiable because the ancient document being read was written much closer in time to the events in question than the critic's life. The ancient document's author is much more likely to have known what was going on than the critic removed by vast gaps in time, space, and/or culture from him.<sup>35</sup> It is the purest poppycock to stamp Luke "WRONG!" just because Josephus (in particular) doesn't mention a census that could have occurred earlier under Quirinius when Luke has shown himself reliable in what can be checked.

#### SUCH ROMAN CENSUSES NOT ABSURD

Conder maintains Luke 2:1 commits an absurdity by saying Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire (MB, p. 36):

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<sup>34</sup>C.L. Blomberg, "Quirinius," International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, vol. 4, p. 12-13; Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, pp. 365-66; Dictionnaire du Nouveau Testament in Crampon's French Bible (1939), p. 360, as cited by Aid to Bible Understanding, p. 1383; McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 200-204; see also McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, p. 71. Sir William Ramsay runs his arguments in favor of certain inscriptions found in and around Antioch as favoring Quirinius serving an earlier term as legate in Syria in The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament, pp. 285, 291; as cited in Insight on the Scriptures, vol. 2 (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York Inc., 1988), p. 767; see also p. 722.

<sup>35</sup>McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, p. 204. (Their form of citation appears to be nonstandard, but they reference it to his Poetics).

Can you imagine the efficient Romans requiring millions of people to suddenly become dislocated and to start traveling back to their ancestral homes to register for a simple tax? Think of the disruption of commerce--which could have hardly been compensated by the few pennies per person such a tax would have brought.

This analysis is flatly wrong historically. The Romans routinely conducted in censuses similar to what Luke describes. Davis states that: "Every five years the Romans enumerated citizens and their property to determine their liabilities. This practice was extended to include the entire Roman Empire in 5 B.C." The enumeration wasn't done to make them to pay a specified small amount in tax, but to assess their ability to pay taxes in the years to come before the next census, and also for drafting men into the Roman legions. Archeological discoveries have found the Romans enrolled taxpayers and every fourteen years held censuses. The emperor Augustus began this practice, with the first taking place in either 23-22 b.c. or 9-8 b.c. An Egyptian papyrus dated to 104 A.D. indicates that the Roman census in Egypt required Egyptians to return to their home city. As Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary relates: "This [the census of Luke 2:1-3] was probably a census required of all nations under the rule of Rome. All citizens were required to return to their places of birth for an official registration of their property for tax purposes."<sup>36</sup> Conder has mistakenly placed too much credence in a certain atheistic science fiction writer's historical knowledge of the ancient world--"the Romans couldn't possibly have conducted so queer a census"!

#### EARLY PAGAN SOURCES WHICH REFER TO JESUS BESIDES THE NEW TESTAMENT

Conder maintains that the Roman historian Tacitus's (c. 56-120 A.D.) statement about Jesus is the only evidence external to the NT for Jesus' life (MB, p. 53). Tacitus wrote skeptically of Jesus and Christianity thus:

Hence to suppress the rumor, he [Nero (r. 54-68 A.D.), who was blamed for the great fire that broke out in Rome under his rule--EVS] falsely charged with the guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Kingsley Davis, Encyclopedia Britannica, 14th ed., 5:168, as cited by Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, p. 366; Aid to Bible Understanding, p. 1383; John Elder, Prophets, Idols and Diggers (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), p. 160; as cited by McDowell, Evidence That Demands a Verdict, p. 71; Adolf Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East, trans. R.M. Strachen, 4th ed. (New York: Doran, 1927), pp. 270-71; as cited by McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, p. 201; Herbert Lockyer Sr., ed., Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), p. 214.

<sup>37</sup>Annals, XV, 44; as cited in McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, p. 82. McDowell and Wilson make a detailed defense of the authenticity of

However, this is not the only early incidental mention of Jesus and/or the Christians by non-Christian writers. The Greek writer and satirist, Lucian of Samosata (c. 120-190 A.D.) once wrote of Jesus as:

the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world. . . . Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they were all brothers one of another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws.

The Roman historian and biographer Suetonius (c. 69-after 122 A.D.) remarked: "As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [the Emperor Claudius--cf. Acts 18:2, where Luke mentions this event independently] expelled them from Rome." This statement was somewhat inaccurate, since he seems to be placing Christ personally in Rome, instead of saying teaching about Christ was agitating the Jews into riots. Pliny the Younger, the governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor (112 A.D.), wrote to the Emperor Trajan about how to treat the Christians. He had been putting many to death, and was asking if all of them should be, or just certain ones. He says of them:

They affirmed, however, that the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verse a hymn to Christ as to a god, and bound themselves to a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft, adultery, never to falsify their word, not to deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up.

Some other ancient writers, such as Thallus, Phlegon, and Mara Bar-Serapion also wrote of Christ, but their mentions are preserved only as fragments in the writings of Christians, making their testimony more problematic as independent evidence.<sup>38</sup>

#### JOSEPHUS AS INDEPENDENT TESTIMONY FOR THE NEW TESTAMENT AND JESUS' LIFE

The ancient Jewish historian Josephus (c. 37-100 A.D.) mentions Jesus twice. He also describes John the Baptist, his ministry, and his execution by Herod, which provides independent support for the NT's account of him.<sup>39</sup> Once he makes a brief allusion to Jesus in a noncommittal or even hostile manner, which heavily supports its authenticity since a committed Christian would not

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this statement, including a reasonable argument that Tacitus based his statement on public records, not just hearsay from Christians in Rome. Both Justin Martyr and Tertullian challenged readers to look up such records about certain details of Jesus' life. He Walked Among Us, pp. 48-51.

<sup>38</sup>Lucian, The Passing Peregrinus; Suetonius, Life of Claudius, 25, 4; Pliny the Younger, Epistles, X, 96; as cited in McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, pp. 82-85.

<sup>39</sup>See Antiquities, book 18, chapter 5, section 2; also cited in McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 37-38.

write such an interpolation about his savior. Ananus, the high priest, "convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned."<sup>40</sup> Especially interestingly, Josephus, being a Jew, shows his awareness of this term's origin by using "Christ" as a title, not a surname, which had increasingly become standard Christian practice. More problematic is this famous passage also found in Josephus:

About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvelous things about him. And the tribe of Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.

Clearly, Josephus could not have written all of this, or else he would have been a Christian, since he calls Jesus the Messiah and asserts belief in His resurrection. On the other hand, it shouldn't be seen as an interpolation created whole cloth (cf. MB, p. 145), since serious evidence does exist for its (partial) authenticity as well. The textual evidence for it is good, since it is found in all the handwritten manuscript copies of Josephus, and Eusebius (c. 260-339 A.D.), the Catholic Church historian, cites it as well. As for internal evidence, when Josephus called Jesus a "wise man," it's not what a Christian would say, but is like what Josephus said of Solomon and Daniel. Calling His miracles "surprising feats" or "astonishing deeds" again isn't what a Christian would say, but Josephus uses the same language to describe the miracles of Elisha. Labeling Christians a "tribe" is something never done in early Christian literature, but fits Josephus's tendency to use this term for the Jews and other national and communal groups. This passage places the blame for the crucifixion mainly upon Pontius Pilate, which certainly was against the prevailing Christian tendency of the second and third centuries (something about which Conder is hardly silent!) The Catholic Church father Origen (c. 185-254? A.D.) said that Josephus denied Jesus was the Messiah, so he couldn't have known this text in this form.

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<sup>40</sup>Antiquities, book 20, chapter 9, section 1; as cited in McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 38-39. Interestingly, in Evidence that Demands a Verdict, p. 83, McDowell cites a more skeptical translation of Josephus in this passage: "the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ, whose name was James." The Greek reads "ho legomenos Christos," which Josephus at least once elsewhere uses in a dismissive tone, such as when he refers to Alexandria as Apion's alleged birthplace. While the NT uses this term in a non-skeptical manner in Matt. 1:16, it's necessary to determine how Josephus uses this term, not use what the NT does as a judge of what Josephus meant. Using this rendering, it becomes totally impossible that it was a Christian scribe's fabricated interpolation. Even using the less skeptical version, it's still a very weak affirmation for a Christian scribe bent on perverting Josephus as supporting Christianity. See France, Evidence for Jesus, p. 27, 171 (fn. 12).

Hence, this passage is a curious mixture of Josephus's literary style and some unknown Christian scribe's doctoring up of it. Instead of tossing it out completely, reconstructing an original text conjecturally is more justifiable.

Consider F.F. Bruce's stab at this, which assumes Josephus took a hostile tone towards Christianity:

Now there arose about this time a source of further trouble in one Jesus, a wise man who performed surprising works, a teacher of men who gladly welcome strange things. He led away many Jews, and also many of the Gentiles. He was the so-called Christ. When Pilate, acting on information supplied by the chief men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had attached themselves to him at first did not cease to cause trouble, and the tribe of Christians, which has taken this name from him, is not extinct even today.<sup>41</sup>

Even with the self-evident Christian changes to this passage removed, it's clear from this passage we can know Jesus did miracles, that some called him the Messiah, that he was executed by Pontius Pilate, and that a religious movement began as a result of his teachings. So we can know more about Jesus outside the NT than just about his bare existence and crucifixion. Some independent testimony for His life appears in non-Christian sources within a century and a half of his death. Conder is simply wrong to claim that "there is no other record of him [Christ] in any authoritative work [than in Tacitus]" (MB, p. 70).

#### CONDER'S RECONSTRUCTION OF JESUS' TRIAL RECONSIDERED

Conder castigates the Gospels' record of the trial of Christ: "These Gospels are notorious for their inaccurate details" (MB, p. 54). He assumes that the Jews would always obey their own laws. He then concludes the large number of ways in which the trial was illegal--12 by Herman Hoeh's count--prove the Gospels are historically inaccurate, and the concoction of some gentile Catholic Church father (see MB, pp. 56-57). But, is this logical? Granted the reality of an evil human nature, and sufficient fear that Jesus was a threat to their position of authority, the powers-that-were in Jewish society could have easily bent and broke every law in the book to accomplish their ends. Once again Conder violates Aristotle's dictum, and assumes 19 centuries after the fact he really knew what went on in the first century, instead of the first-century writers of the NT. He then assumes he can ignore whatever they record at will whenever it conflicts with his thesis of savaging the New Testament. The fundamental reason why Jesus was put to death from the Jewish viewpoint was not just blasphemy, but because His miracles constituted a threat to their political and religious authority and their control over doctrine. Note John 10:48-50, 53, which describes the results of the sensation caused by Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead: "Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, 'What are we doing? For this man [Jesus] is performing many signs. If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans

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<sup>41</sup>France, Evidence for Jesus, pp. 29-31; McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 41-45. Note that an Arabic text of this same passage of Josephus has been found in a tenth century mss.. This may contain something closer to the original, assuming a Muslim scribe hadn't toned down the doctored up "Christianized" version!

will come and take away both our place [position of authority] and our nation." After Caiaphas, the high priest, explained that "'it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish.'" they "from that day on . . . planned together to kill Him." The Jewish leadership even wanted to kill Lazarus "because on account of him many of the Jews were going away, and were believing in Jesus" (John 12:11). They were infuriated by His ability to perform miracles while teaching doctrines that they disagreed with, which demonstrated God was on His side, not theirs. Hence, after saying it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath, and healing a man's withered hand, "the Pharisees went out, and they counseled together against Him, as to how they might destroy Him" (Matt. 12:14; cf. Luke 6:11). Plainly, the Pharisees saw the threat to their religious authority when after miraculously healing a woman bent over double by a spirit, He replied to their accusations that He broke the Sabbath thus (Luke 13:15-17):

'You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall, and lead him away to water him? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?' And as He said this, all His opponents were being humiliated; and the entire multitude was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him.

Plainly, Jesus subverted their religious authority, and the multitudes were beginning to increasingly turn to Him to interpret the Torah for them, instead of the established religious leadership of the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, lawyers, etc. They also feared that if the people believed in him, it might spark Roman intervention. With their power threatened by Him, their desire to strike back should not seem remarkable or unusual.

Jesus also was accused of blasphemy. After healing a man on the Sabbath, and telling him to pick up his pallet and walk,

the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was going these things on the Sabbath. But He answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.' For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God (John 5:16-18).

Similarly, after Jesus forgave the sins of a paralytic he was about to heal, some of the scribes hearing Him reasoned in their hearts: "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7). Jesus' ability to perform miracles was especially threatening to the Jewish establishment. That power, along with His perfect character and the support of the multitudes, surely made them envious, indeed "haters of the good for being the good," which even the pagan Pontius Pilate perceived. He asked the crowd while Jesus was on trial: "'Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' For he was aware that the chief priests had delivered Him up because of envy" (Mark 15:10; cf. Matt. 27:18). The Jewish religious establishment, or part of it, knew that Jesus was sent by God (note the use of "we" in John 3:1-2). Nevertheless, they felt so threaten by Him they hurriedly sought to kill Him just before the Days of Unleavened Bread began (which answers Conder's question about why He was put "to death in the space of just a few hours" (MB, p. 61). This desire for speed, to beat the first

Holy Day of the year (Nisan 15), was one of the main reasons so much of Jesus' trial was illegal, over and above the problems of finding something to accuse Him of when He had lived a perfectly sinless life (Matthew 26:3-5): "Then the chief priests and the elder of the people were gathered together in the court of the high priest, named Caiaphas; and they plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth, and kill Him. But they were saying, 'Not during the festival, lest a riot occur among the people.'" So between their envy of Jesus, such as over His ability to do miracles, their fear of how He threatened their positions of religious authority over the Jewish people, and their desires for a speedy trial to condemn Jesus before the first spring Holy Day began, it should not seem remarkable that they broke a lot of their own laws to convict Him under such extreme circumstances (cf. Paul's illegal mistreatment before the Sanhedrin by being struck (Acts 23:3)).

#### THE ROMANS' INDIFFERENCE TO DOCTRINAL DISPUTES AMONG THE JEWS

What undermines Conder's reconstruction of Jesus' trial was that Jesus was put to death for violating Jewish law, not Roman. When the Jewish leadership charged Jesus with violating Roman law, they were lying through their teeth (Luke 23:2): "'We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.'" Pilate himself said to "the chief priests and the rulers and the people" that "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him. No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us . . ." (Luke 23:13-15). After all, Jesus said taxes should be paid to the Roman authorities, following His principle of rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's (Matt. 22:17-22). Jesus was not in the business of getting involved in the world's politics, nor, following His example, did the early Christians, who refused to serve in the military or in political office.<sup>42</sup> He refused to let the crowd He had fed miraculously to make Him king (John 6:15): "Jesus therefore perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force, to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone." Jesus, although He was a king, made it clear before Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36-37).<sup>43</sup> Jesus simply was not going to set up the kingdom of God on

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<sup>42</sup>On this score of early Christians not being involved in politics, note what historians Albert K. Heckel and James G. Sigman write: "Early Christianity was little understood and was regarded with little favor by those who ruled the pagan world. . . . Christians refused to share certain duties of Roman citizens. . . . They would not hold political office" (On the Road to Civilization, A World History (Philadelphia: 1937), pp. 237, 238 as cited in "Make Sure of All Things Hold Fast to What Is Fine" (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1965), p. 353). This fact undermines Conder's claims that Simon Magus, the early Catholic Church fathers, etc. really had in mind creating a universal religion, which inevitably would require political involvement since religion and politics were inevitably tightly intertwined in the ancient world.

<sup>43</sup>Here Jesus made it plain that His followers would not fight. Jesus told His followers to buy swords merely to act the part of being "numbered with transgressors" (such as a band of robbers getting arrested) in order to fulfill prophecy (Luke 22:36-38). After all, when Jesus was satisfied with his disciples having just two swords, could He REALLY so blind (humanly

earth at that time, so charging Him with political subversion against the Roman state was simply false. He corrected the common expectation of many Jews that He was the Conquering Messiah who was going to set up God's kingdom at that time with His parable of the minas (v. 11): "He was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately." (This fact undercuts Conder's analysis on p. 88 of MB). The Jewish leadership really wanted Jesus executed for saying He was God, the Son of God, and/or the Messiah (John 8:58-59; 5:18; 10:30-33; 19:7; Mark 14:61-64; Matt. 26:63-66; Luke 22:70-71). Later on, during the proceedings before Pilate, they even admitted to their real motive for wanting Him dead (John 19:7): "The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God.'" Had this been the initial official charge, it might have been dismissed. Pilate's response might have been similar to Gallio's, proconsul of Achaia, when the Jews hauled Paul before him. He dismissed them from his court with these words (Acts 18:14-15): "If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters." Similarly, consider Festus's characterization of the charges against the apostle Paul when on trial (Acts 25:18-19, 25, 27):

And when the accusers stood up, they began bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting; but they simply had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a certain dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive. . . . But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him. Yet I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord. . . . For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him.

The pagan Romans simply were not concerned about what they perceived as intramural doctrinal disputes between different factions within some recently conquered subject race's alien religion. Threats against their continued ability to tax and rule over some province of their empire were what mattered to them. The Roman commander who had Paul delivered over to Felix under a large armed guard had a similar attitude (Acts 23:28-29). The Romans simply couldn't have cared less if Jesus called himself God or the Son of God, especially when they sometimes worshipped emperors who called themselves gods, or who allowed themselves to be called such, like Augustus, Caligula, Tiberius, etc. So long as Jesus did not lead some group in revolt against Roman rule, like Theudas or Judas of Galilee (Acts 5:36-37), they wouldn't have been interested if He called Himself the Messiah. Furthermore, they had a typically polytheistic attitude of live and let live about others worshiping other gods. Saying Jesus was hauled up before Pilate on charges of political subversion is an old higher critic viewpoint, but it lacks any solid foundation when considering the words and actions of Jesus himself.

#### CONDER'S USE OF THE ARGUMENT FROM SILENCE

Conder repeatedly makes the mistake of reasoning that if only the New Testament refers to some event, and no other pagan or Jewish source does, then

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speaking) to think that this would be sufficient to overthrow Roman rule? (See MB, p. 99--Jesus "exhorted his followers to buy swords").



whatever is mentioned is automatically suspect. For example, he reasons concerning Pilate's power to pardon at the Passover, "it is interesting that, outside the New Testament, no such custom is known in Jewish history" (MB, p. 58). Similarly, he argues concerning the resurrection of the saints mentioned in Matt. 27:52: "This event, needless to say, isn't known by the other three gospels. Nor is it known by Josephus or any other historian of the time--and given such a spectacle, it certainly wouldn't have been overlooked" (MB, p. 68). He cites Kersey Graves' criticism that Matthew's record of the murder of innocent children in Bethlehem was an event not mentioned by Josephus, thereby making it suspect (MB, p. 37). In all of these cases he is arguing from silence, which is a logical fallacy, and denies Aristotle's dictum, which maintains the benefit of the doubt is given to the document, and not the critic. The Old Testament mentions many events not described elsewhere--does that make them historically false or invalid? No reference to the Exodus has been found among ancient Egyptian records at the time it occurred. Does that mean it never happened? Rather, this means the Egyptian priests (remember--they wrote the hieroglyphics and kept the basic records) wouldn't want to record any events that humbled them and their gods, so this spectacular event just gets conveniently overlooked. The idea of writing unbiased history only arose among the Greeks (arguably with Thucydides's history of the Peloponnesian War of 431-404 b.c.), and, as an ideal and actual practice, always has had an uphill battle ever since in the world. Similarly, would Josephus or some pagan historian record events that prove their worldview wrong? It was hardly likely! To say a historical document is invalid because its contents aren't replicated elsewhere is an argument from a lack of evidence. In a sound argument, there are correct premises with a valid form (organization), which means there is some positive evidence for the assertion. An argument from silence is based on non-existent (a lack of) evidence. True, it can sometimes have force in some contexts, such as for dating a document concerning BIG events hard to overlook. For example, if a modern European history textbook had its copyright page missing, but was otherwise complete, and it covered the Great Depression, but nothing about WWII or anything afterwards, it's safe to conclude it was written in the 1930s. Still, it's fundamentally invalid; nobody should place his faith in such arguments as a basis for his salvation! So when Conder complains that the Catholic Church supposedly destroyed "the truth of Christian origins from the world by burning pagan libraries," he is arguing from silence.<sup>44</sup> But as

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<sup>44</sup>Actually, the Catholic Church did a reasonable job of preserving and transmitting the knowledge of the ancient world, granted the terrible chaos of the Dark Ages, including various barbarian invasions. It copied and translated ancient works that had been translated and preserved in Arabic from the Greek originals. As a standard textbook for Western Civilization classes notes: "As St. Augustine urged, Christians were allowed, like the ancient Israelites, to carry off the treasures of the Egyptians (that is, the learning of the pagans) in order to place them at the service of the one true God. This Christian accommodation with pagan learning had decisive repercussions. Nearly all the texts of the great pagan authors have reached us in copies made by Christians. They preserved them because they believed they would be useful in Christian education and theology. Paradoxically, these outspoken enemies of pagan values were instrumental in the survival of a rich cultural heritage, which they claimed to hate" (Mortimer Chambers, et al., The Western Experience, 3rd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), p. 158). The attack made under Theodosius (391 A.D.) against the Alexandrian library's collection on (in particular) one of the ancient mystery religions'

discussed above, since the Gospels (and Acts) have proven themselves reliable in what can be checked by archeological data and/or ancient non-Christian sources, what can't be checked should be assumed to be true, which is a process of inference, and not blind faith.

#### CONDER'S USE OF AN ANCIENT JEWISH SLANDER: JESUS BEN PANTHERA

Further proof of Conder's uncritical methodology is his use of the ancient Jewish slander that Jesus was born illegitimately (cf. John 8:41), having for a father a Roman soldier by the name of Pandera or Panthera. Supposedly there was another man by the name of Jesus ben Pandera, the story of whose life was uncritically absorbed by Christianity (see MB, pp. 134-35, 145-46). Conder absurdly calls Celsus, the ancient pagan critic of Christianity who wrote a harsh polemic against Christianity, a "historian" (which implies some level of objectivity) (MB, p. 145). Instead, what Celsus did was take up the Jews' slander of Jesus, and use it for his own purposes. Historian Robin Lane Fox describes Celsus's work that attacked Christianity by noting it put a Jew in its forefront. He reels off the claim that Jesus had been born of an adulterous relationship between this Roman soldier and Mary, and later practiced sorcery and magical arts [which admits obliquely to His ability to perform miracles by the power of God] while begging for a living with His worthless disciples. "Much of this abuse matches the allusions to Jesus which occur in later, written versions of the Jews' 'anti-Gospels.' In the 170s Celsus the Platonist had clearly picked up the Jews' own slanders." How did the name "Panthera" become associated with Jesus? A highly plausible reconstruction is to say it was a corruption of the Greek word for virgin, "parthenos," [which appears in the Greek Septuagint translation of the OT for Isa. 7:14, always a battleground messianic text between Christians and Jews]. It also has been suggested it came from "pentheiros," meaning "son-in-law." As Klausner states: "The Jews constantly heard that the Christians (the majority of whom spoke Greek from the earliest times) called Jesus by the name 'Son of the Virgin,' . . . and so, in mockery, they called him Ben ha-Pantera, i.e., 'son of the leopard.'" But Jesus could have gained this epithet by another means. This name, as verified by first-century inscriptions, was fairly frequent. After saying it was as common as the names Fox or Wolf today, Rabbi and Professor Morris Goldstein commented:

It is noteworthy that Orig[e]n himself is credited with the tradition that Panther was the appellation of James (Jacob), the father of Joseph, the father of Jesus. . . . So, too, Andrew of Crete, John of Damascus, Epiphanius the Monk, and the author of Andronicus of Constantinople's Dialogue Against the News, name Panther as an ancestor of Jesus.

Since one statement in the Babylonian Talmud (Yebamoth 62b) authorizes someone to be called by his grandfather's name, this may explain how Jesus received this name, which the Jews totally twisted into a lurid slander against His

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writings was hardly the only attack ever made: The Arabs later finished it off (perhaps c. 641 A.D.)

virgin birth.<sup>45</sup> Conder very dubiously takes an ancient pagan polemic's claims at face value. (Would he accept what Celsus, an Epicurean philosopher, believed about Judaism?) Conder's uncritical use of sources marks him as a poor would-be historian.

#### THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE TEST: DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT CONTRADICT ITSELF?

Now, let's apply the third of Sanders's tests for evaluating historical documents, the internal evidence test, to the New Testament. Claiming the Old Testament or New Testament contains contradictions is an old assertion of unbelievers. Conder, when he charges the NT has contradictions, merely recycles what various atheists, agnostics, deists, liberal higher critics, infidels, etc. have said down through the decades and centuries. Most of the issues he raises, such as the two genealogies of Christ found in Matthew and Luke being contradictory between themselves and/or the Old Testament, are hardly anything "new." Conder's work is scarcely a new revelation of religious truth, but an old retread of standard unbelievers' assertions. His originality chiefly lies in placing them in the service of Judaism instead of unbelief plain and simple. The same crowd of scholars, etc. Conder refers to have refuted the Old Testament to their satisfaction as much as the New, yet he uncritically uses them just to go after the latter.<sup>46</sup> He ignores how the problems found in Old from their viewpoint are surely worse. For example, a straight reading of Genesis 1 contradicts the theory of evolution, and the Deluge contradicts uniformitarian geology (which maintains all the processes the affect the earth's crust are slow and gradual in nature). Those interested in many of the solutions to the puzzles Conder raises about the NT should turn to Archer's Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, John W. Haley's Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible, which is an older work, or any solid conservative commentary that accepts the Bible as the inspired word of God. It's simply absurd to read only what Conder says, and think that's the end of the story, when standard replies to these alleged contradictions are readily available, and when similar arguments have long been used against various parts of the OT by the same set of unbelieving scholars, which sure doesn't seem to worry Conder any!

#### DOES AN ADDITION OR SUBTRACTION OF DETAIL CREATE A "CONTRADICTION"?

Conder, when deducing various NT contradictions, assumes that an addition or omission of detail creates a contradiction. (He also may be

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<sup>45</sup>Fox, Pagans and Christians, pp. 482-83; Joseph Klausner, Jesus of Nazareth (New York: Menorah Publishing Co., 1925), p. 23; Adolf Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East, 4th ed., trans. R.M. Strachen (New York: Doran, 1927), pp. 73-74; Morris Goldstein, Jesus in Jewish Tradition (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1950), pp. 38, 39; the last three as cited in McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 66-67.

<sup>46</sup>Someone may object that I cite in this essay scholars and writers with doctrinal teachings I reject, and say Conder merely is doing the same when using scholars who reject both the NT and OT. This argument has a point, but ignores a major difference: He uses some of the same methods of reasoning that higher critics do, such as the argument from silence, the rejection of supernatural intervention in the world (implicitly, in places), and the uncritical citation of liberal scholarship. If he used the same types of arguments against the OT, it would be equally refuted.

implicitly assuming that a Gospel's narrative always proceeds in chronological order). For example, he attacks the resurrection accounts thus (MB, pp. 67-68): "Luke, who asserts that the only [?] resurrection appearances took place in and around Jerusalem, contradicts John who states that these took place in both Jerusalem and Galilee." How is it that if Luke describes certain appearances of the resurrected Christ occurring in one place, but doesn't mention other appearances, such as when Jesus appeared to the disciples in Galilee, this is a "contradiction"? Where does Luke say, "I have recorded every appearance of the resurrected Christ, and they were . . .", i.e., that he made an exhaustive and complete list. The contradiction would only then exist if John records appearances not found in Luke. Similarly, consider this analysis:

Again I ask, which is it? Does John's account have it right: no angels; no earthquake; and none of the disciples or the women knowing what had happened: does the angel appear to Mary after which Jesus himself appears? Or does Matthew's account have it right: an angel of the "Lord" descended from heaven, an earthquake occurs, and the stone is rolled away, after which this angel informs the women what happened to Jesus and asks them to go and tell the disciples. (MB, p. 68)

Since Matthew mentioned an earthquake had occurred earlier during the night, during which the guards became like dead men, but John doesn't, this additional information found in one Gospel is supposed to "contradict" the other. Anyway, John's account actually does mention the two angels (John 20:12-13): "She beheld two angels in white sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying," one of whom asks, "'Woman, why are you weeping?'" Similarly, when Conder notes that the Gospel writers mention one or more women were at Christ's tomb early in the morning, the fact that the different Gospels add or omit referring to the other women who were with her does not make this into a "contradiction." WE SHOULD NOT ASSUME THAT EACH GOSPEL ACCOUNT GIVES ALL OF THE DETAILS DESCRIBING THE SITUATION. In a modern court of law a contradiction wouldn't be proven because one witness failed to see, state, or remember all the details of a crime he or she saw committed differs from another who remembered a somewhat different list of details about the same event, so long as the differences concern additions and omissions of detail. A description that a bank robber wore a hat is NOT contradicted by another witness saying nothing about a hat, but saw him wearing an overcoat. The contradiction only would occur if (in this example) the second witness also explicitly said that the criminal had not worn a hat. This is why is it wrong for Conder to imply Luke and John contradict one another concerning the length of Christ's ministry (MB, p. 52).

You have to put all the data together first from all four Gospels, and then draw general conclusions from them like this. Taking this general approach makes it superfluous for me to go through his long list of supposed contradictions in the resurrection accounts: Armed with this principle, you can see how weak Conder's arguments in this regard really are when rereading them. Furthermore, there are places in the OT where, if this principle is denied, that make it "contradictory," such as the "two creation accounts" (Gen. 1:1-2:4 and Gen. 2:5-25) or in the parallel histories in I and II Kings and I and II Chronicles, such as the omission of evil king Manasseh's

repentance by the writer of II Kings (compare II Chron. 33:9-18 with II Kings 21:1-17).<sup>47</sup>

#### SUPPOSED NEW TESTAMENT "CONTRADICTIONS" BRIEFLY EXAMINED

Conder argues the NT has a number of contradictions (see MB, pp. 58, 153-54). Is he right? For example, was Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, not Berechiah, as Christ said in Matt. 23:35? Here the problem is to identify correctly the right "Zechariah." Since Zechariah of Jehoiada died 800 b.c., saying he was the last of the OT martyrs (as Christ's words imply, since Abel certainly was the first) is not likely. Since about 30 separate individuals in the OT have this name, it shouldn't be surprising that two of them suffered a similar fate. Christ is presumably referring to the minor prophet Zechariah (see Zech. 1:1), who prophesied from about 520-475 b.c. This man, who lived much closer to the time the OT canon closed than Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, is certainly a more plausible candidate for the last OT martyr. Since so little is known about Zechariah the son of Berechiah's life from the OT, there is nothing to deny that he died exactly as Christ said here. As Archer noted: "If we take Matthew 23:35 just as it stands, it makes perfectly sense in its context; and it offers no contradiction to any known and established facts of history."<sup>48</sup> Was Christ wrong to say in Mark 2:25-26 "in the time of Abiathar the high priest" David and his companions were given the showbread to eat? I Sam. 21:1-6 says it was Ahimelech who gave David the consecrated bread. For this text it's necessary to note very carefully the literal wording "in the time of Abiathar the high priest," for Christ didn't say "Abiathar gave David the showbread." After Saul commanded Doeg the Edomite to kill all the priests at Nob except Abiathar (I Sam. 22:9, 16-22), the latter was made high priest by King David. The Greek reads "Epi Abiathar archiereos," and "epi" combined with the genitive means "in the time of." (Compare Acts 11:28; Heb. 1:2 for similar constructions). As Archer explains:

Under these circumstances it was perfectly proper to refer to Abiathar as the high priest--even though his appointment as such came somewhat later, after the incident at Nob--just as it would be proper to introduce an anecdote by saying, "Now when King David was a shepherd boy," even though David was not actually a king at the time he was a shepherd boy. . . . The episode did happen "in the time of" Abiathar; he was not only alive but actually present when the event took place, and he very shortly afterward became high priest as a result of Saul's murdering his father, Ahimelech.<sup>49</sup>

Saying Luke was wrong to call Bethlehem "the city of David" (Luke 2:4-5) instead of Jerusalem ignores how Bethlehem was the city of David concerning ancestry, while Jerusalem became his city by conquest (II Sam. 5:6-7). Note I Sam. 17:12: "Now David was the son of the Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah,

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<sup>47</sup>A good attempt to deal with the various issues raised by the parallel accounts of the resurrection is found in Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, pp. 345-56.

<sup>48</sup>Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, pp. 337-338; Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, pp. 1117-1119.

<sup>49</sup>Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, p. 362.

whose name was Jesse, and he had eight sons . . ." The events of the book of Ruth took place largely in or around this city, with Ruth and Boaz being two of David's ancestors (see Ruth 4:11, 21-22). Hence, as a place for registering for their ancestry during the Roman census, a descendant of David such as Joseph logically came to this city, not Jerusalem, to register, thus making it "the city of David" on this basis.

#### CONDER V. STEPHEN: WHAT IS THE VERDICT?

Conder also directs his fire against Stephen's speech that summarized OT history before the infuriated Jews martyred him. Stephen said that Abraham left Haran after his father died (Acts 7:4). If Abraham was 75 when he left Haran (Gen. 12:4), and his father Terah was 70 when Abraham was born (Gen. 11:26), and Terah was 205 years old before he died (Gen. 11:32), then Terah lived 60 years after Abraham left Haran. This argument, as good as it looks on its surface, assumes something problematic in this context. On genealogical lists, is the first name listed always the first one born? Note carefully Gen. 11:26: "And Terah lived seventy years, and became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran." Terah's sons surely were not triplets all born on the same day in the same year, but gaps had to occur between them. Since Abram, later Abraham, was by far the most prominent in biblical history, it makes sense his name would be listed first, before that of one or two older brothers. Similarly, when Adam had Seth, he was not his oldest son. Cain and Abel were older, yet in Gen. 5:3-4 they were lumped together as part of his "other sons and daughters." Then Stephen says 75 entered Egypt under Jacob, while the Old Testament in the Hebrew text says 70 (see Acts 7:14; Gen. 46:27; Ex. 1:5; Deut. 10:22). Is Stephen wrong? Archer notes that Stephen follows the enumeration found in the Septuagint, which reads 75 in Gen. 46:27 and Ex. 1:5. Two approaches can be taken to reconcile this discrepancy. One is to say both totals are right--by adding the sons of Manasseh and Ephraim born to them in Egypt before Jacob died, the 75 figure is easily reached (note I Chron. 7:14-15, 20-23). After all, since Joseph and his two sons were already in Egypt, they didn't have to migrate to live there. The other approach builds upon the somewhat differing wording found in Acts 7:14 compared to Gen. 46:26, which excludes the wives of Jacob's children in the latter text, but not in the former. It also implicitly excludes those who didn't have to migrate to go to Egypt (i.e., Joseph and his sons). Read Acts 7:14 carefully: "And Joseph sent word and invited Jacob his father and his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons in all." (Note that "in all" is in italics in the NASB, and so isn't in the original text). "Relatives" can include wives here, who were specifically excluded in the Gen. 46:26 count. Haley explains his reasoning thus: "If to the sixty-six we add the nine wives of Jacob's sons (Judah's and Simeon's wives were dead; Joseph could not be said to call himself, his own wife, or his two sons into Egypt; and Jacob is specified separately by Stephen), we have seventy-five persons, as in Acts."<sup>50</sup> Hence, since these two numbers could have been reached by different means, the Septuagint shouldn't be automatically ruled wrong textually (the Hebrew Masoretic text is to be preferred, but not always).

Does Acts 7:16, which says Abraham bought land for a tomb from the sons of Hamor, contradict Josh. 24:32 and Gen. 33:19, which say Jacob conducted

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<sup>50</sup>John W. Haley, Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House), p. 389; Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, pp. 378-379.

this purchase? The solution here is to say the same piece of land was bought twice, once by Abraham and once by Jacob. Absurd you say? Consider a remarkable parallel in which Abraham and Isaac may have bought the same land for a well twice at Beersheba. Abraham offered seven ewe lambs to Abimelech as a witness he dug a well at Beersheba (Gen. 21:27-33). Isaac later had a feast, and made a covenant with Abimelech (presumably a son or grandson of the one Abraham dealt with) to gain peace. Isaac's servants dug a well, and got water on the same day of Abimelech's departure after the feast was over (Gen. 26:26-33). This could have involved the same piece of land, but due to Abraham and Isaac's nomadic lifestyle, it had reverted back to the original owners. The same could have happened concerning the tomb bought from the sons of Hamor because too much time may have passed between the time Abraham bought this land for a tomb, thus requiring Jacob had to buy it again. Compare it to how a modern American city eventually takes abandoned housing for back taxes, requiring the past owners basically to buy it again (such as by paying all the accrued property taxes) if they want to possess it again. This could explain how the sons (family) of Hamor repossessed it after an evident abandonment lasting for decades (185 years by Haley's count). Furthermore, it is known that Abraham had been at Shechem during his lifetime, which was where God appeared to him and he in turn built an altar to Yahweh (Gen. 12:6-7). He could have possibly chosen to buy the land he put his altar on. Stephen's mention of others being buried there doesn't contradict the text in Joshua, which merely mentions Joseph being buried there. An addition or omission of detail is not a contradiction, so long as the word "only" or some equivalent doesn't appear in that same passage. Joshua 24:32 does not deny that others were buried there. Furthermore, Jerome said in his eighty-sixth epistle that at Shechem the tombs for the 12 patriarchs were on display at the time he lived, which goes along with a Samaritan tradition that has been preserved for many centuries. (Josephus said the bodies of the patriarchs were carried out of Egypt, but that they were buried at Hebron). So Stephen's account of the purchase and burials at Shechem shouldn't be written off as a fable, especially when even today abandonment is a prima facie way for land to change hands after an extended period of neglect by one owner.<sup>51</sup> Conder's assault on Stephen's speech really falls rather flat--if it was written by some rather ignorant gentile "church father" decades or centuries later, you'd think many more and much more serious problems would be in his recapitulation of OT history than this (judging from the low quality of the apocryphal gospels, etc.)

Let's examine some of the other "contradictions" Conder deduces. First of all, does I Cor. 10:8 contradict Num. 25:9? (MB, pp. 58, 154). Numbers says 24,000 Israelites died in a plague, while in I Cor. Paul says 23,000 died after acting immorally. Conder's mistakenly assumes I Cor. 10:8 refers to when Israel played the harlot with the daughters of Moab, instead of when Israel worshipped the golden calf at the foot of Mount Sinai. Since the preceding verse, I Cor. 10:7, cites Ex. 32:6, Paul could have had a different incident in mind than that found in Num. 25:9. True, the golden calf incident mentions specifically only 3,000 as being slain by the Levites (Ex. 32:28). But then, God also sent a plague against Israel that day for its sins (v. 35): "Then the Lord smote ['plagued'--NKJV] the people, because of what they did

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<sup>51</sup>See generally Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, pp. 379-81; Haley, Alleged Discrepancies, p. 357; Francis D. Nichol, ed., The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 6 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), p. 199.

with the calf which Aaron had made." While Exodus records no specific figure on how many this plague killed, it appears Paul may have gotten the 23,000 figure by direct revelation from God centuries after the golden calf incident.

Another possibility also exists--transmissional error. There are about 18 or 20 cases in which the numbers as found in I and II Chron. do not line up with the parallel figures in I and II Kings and/or I and II Samuel. For example, II Chron. 9:25 says Solomon built 4,000 stalls for horses and chariots, while I Kings 4:26 lists 40,000. Proof this is a transmissional error is shown by how the number of horsemen in both verses is the same: 12,000. Now, do such discrepancies prove we should have no faith in the Old Testament? Of course not. Because of the writing system used before the Jewish scribes called the Sopherim imposed copied the numbers in words, a scribe could easily mistake the number of dots standing for thousands over the letters that stood for each number in an ageing, increasingly brittle manuscript. When considering the hundreds of cases the numbers do line up between the parallel sources in the OT, the cases in which they don't are hardly cause for doubt.<sup>52</sup> It could be the difference between Paul's 23,000 figure and Numbers 25's 24,000 figure lies in some scribal error that occurred centuries before Paul even lived--assuming that Paul was referring to the incident in Num. 25, which hardly has been proven.

Are Gen. 47:31 and Heb. 11:21 contradictory? The former text has Jacob worshipping at the head of his bed, while the latter has him worshipping while leaning on a staff. This discrepancy can be easily reconciled: The Hebrew word for "bed" and "staff" have the same consonants, but different vowel points--"mittah" versus "mattah." Since the vowel points were added to the Hebrew text in the ninth century A.D. or earlier, the Jewish scribes of that time had to determine what word "MTTH" stood for in Gen. 47:31. They opted for "bed." However, the Greek Septuagint (remember, it was translated before the NT was written) reads "staff," as well as the Syriac Peshitta (Aramaic translation). Furthermore, since Joseph placed his hand under Jacob's (Israel's) thigh in Gen. 47:29, it's more sensible to see Jacob, before his condition evidently worsened in the next chapter, as sitting at the side of his bed (instead of on/at its head), perhaps while he did lean on a staff. There's good reason to maintain that the Hebrew vowel points are in error here, and to side with the NT/Septuagint reading ("staff").<sup>53</sup> Do Hebrews 9:19-20 and Ex. 24:6-8 contradict each other? Moses sprinkled both the book of the covenant and the people in the former text, but not in the latter. This can be easily disposed by the principle mentioned in connection with the resurrection accounts: An addition or omission of detail is not a contradiction. Conder implies one is in Col. 1:15's description of Jesus, for which he proffers an interpretation Jehovah's Witnesses would be comfortable with (MB, p. 90). Actually, "first-born" cannot be read to mean "first created." First, at least according to the Catholic Greek language scholar Erasmus (1466?-1536), "prototokos" can mean "original bringer forth." It also could mean "first begetter." Then, remember that Jesus was the first born from the dead (Rev. 1:5; Col. 1:18)--i.e., the first to be born again. In the past, the first born son was considered preeminent over his siblings, and had a high position (Gen. 49:3). Note how Ephraim is called the "first-born" in

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<sup>52</sup>Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, pp. 221-222, 401.

<sup>53</sup>Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, p. 421; Haley, Alleged Discrepancies, pp. 345-46.



Jer. 31:9, yet actually he was younger than Manasseh (Gen. 48:17-19).<sup>54</sup> So this was a title given to Christ meant to exalt Him, not to reveal that He was a creature. As already seen above, Conder's quick take on the New Testament's contradictions are hardly persuasive: Some can be very easily disposed of, which betrays a bias that sees contradictions when none exist.

#### DID MATTHEW MISQUOTE ZECHARIAH?

Does a contradiction occur between Matt. 27:9-10 and Zech. 11:12-13? Matthew cites Jeremiah as speaking this prophecy, while the actual citation is found in Zechariah alone. Or is it? First, one possible source of this discrepancy should briefly be considered--if the names for Jeremiah and Zechariah were written at one time in short form, they are remarkably similar--"Iriou" and "Zriou." A scribal error changing the first letter alone would change the quote's reference. But now let's examine the evidence more closely. The text in Zechariah doesn't actually mention a field as being bought or sold by anyone, which was the main point of the citation. But Jeremiah does purchase a field as a type of the buying and selling that will occur during the millennium in Judea. Note Jer. 32:6-9. Here two quotes were combined together into one, with the less prominent author omitted in favor of the more famous. Mark 1:2-3 presents a similar situation, in which quotes from Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 are placed together, yet only Isaiah is mentioned. Since such citations were routine in first-century writings, we should be wary of imposing our modern standards upon the past, and claiming them errant when they don't conform to our expectations. Incidentally, Conder elsewhere (MB, pp. 116-17) cites Asimov, who maintains that a mistranslation occurred in the KJV when "potter" appears in Zech. 11:13. Unfortunately, an ancient mistranslation found in the Syriac (Aramaic) cloud the situation, in which the translator put "treasury" for "potter" evidently. The word here is "yasar" (3335), which means, according to Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament, p. 86: "to form, mold, fashion." . . . Yasar is a technical potter's word, and it is often used in connection with the potter at work (Isa. 29:16; Jer. 18:4,6)." When looking up the word listed for 3335 ("yasar"--"to form") in Gesenius' (p. 343), a reference to 3136a appears. At that place Gesenius's translator from German into English attacks Gesenius's belief the word "treasury" appears in Zechariah: "[This is wrong altogether; the word certainly means a potter in this place [Zechariah]; the Syriac translator made a mistake, and this mistake is taken as a sufficient ground for contradicting the New Test.!!]" Brown-Driver-Brigg's (p. 427) mentions a dispute over this word, but still lists it under the word for "potter," saying other scholars, including Gesenius, believe its appearance in Zech. 11:13 and Lamentations 4:2 is an error for another word. John Wheeler, a Global Church of God laymember who can read Hebrew, explains the situation thus:

How can the same "mistake" be made twice in two verses ["potter" is mentioned twice in v. 13--EVs]--and toward a direction which is contrary to the negative cast of the prophecy? There is a principle of classical textual criticism that the more "difficult" reading is always preferable. "Treasury" is the "easier" reading;

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<sup>54</sup>See Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, Handbook of Today's Religions Understanding the Cults (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1982), pp. 64-72.

but why would Zechariah cast there the money he (and God) regarded as worthless?<sup>55</sup>

Evidently, Gesenius, etc. thought the Hebrew text was defective at this point, so in order to reconstruct it they adopted this ancient Syriac translator's interpretation of this verse when he rendered the Hebrew into Aramaic. Then Asimov and, in turn, Conder (ironically perhaps for someone who exalts the Hebrew Masoretic text so far above other versions) lean upon this very doubtful textual reconstruction.<sup>56</sup> Conder's critique of Matthew's citation of Zechariah has been led astray by Asimov's analysis, and by assuming that the NT's citations of the OT should abide by contemporary and not first-century human standards of scholarship.

#### DO CERTAIN MESSIANIC PROPHECIES CONTRADICT THE NEW TESTAMENT?

Conder maintains that Jesus did not keep silent, which contradicts two messianic prophecies (Isa. 42:2; 53:7) that said He would be (MB, pp. 95, 99).

Here Conder's mistake is quite simple: Did they mean Christ would be that way all the time, or just at one point in His life? Obviously during His ministry, as He witnessed to His fellow Jews, He was not silent. Rather, they just refer to the main part of His trials before Caiaphas and Pilate. It was only at the last extremity that Christ answered either concerning the charges made against Him, when the natural human reaction when your life is at stake is to loudly deny them as much as possible from the beginning. For example, in Matthew 26:62, despite all the false charges made against Him, the high priest declared, "Do You make no answer?" Then in Matt. 26:63-64 occurs the final exchange that led directly to Jesus' conviction:

But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, 'I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.' Jesus said to him, 'You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.'

Similarly, Jesus was silent before Pilate much of the time, and said the barest minimum (Matt. 27:11-15; Mark 15:5), despite all the charges His accusers hurled at Him. It's absurd to take these texts to mean Jesus would say nothing during His entire ministry. Instead, the issue is at what specific points in time would these texts apply, and they clearly did not apply to His entire ministry, but just to part of His dramatic trial. (Let's be wary of taking Jesus' minimalistic replies and saying this isn't complete "silence," since hyperbolic figures of speech shouldn't be taken totally literally).

Does Isa. 53:3, which mentions the Suffering Servant of the Eternal being rejected contradict Jesus being praised in Luke 4:15? (MB, p. 99). This claim overlooks how immediately after Jesus read from Isaiah in the synagogue the crowd there sought to kill Him since He exalted God's dealings with the gentiles (see Luke 4:22-29). Jesus was forsaken in the end, since even His

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<sup>55</sup>John H. Wheeler, "Letter to Eric Snow," July 19, 199[7], p. 6.

<sup>56</sup>Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, p. 345; Haley, Alleged Discrepancies, p. 153.

disciples fled when their Shepherd was struck down by being arrested (Matt. 26:31). He died as one of the rejected ones of Israel, crucified as a common criminal. Conder creates a contradiction by quoting out of context Jesus' words to His twelve disciples "not to enter any city of the Samaritans" (Matt. 10:5) as if they applied to all places at all times (MB, p. 133). The truth of the matter is that this was for a special limited mission, not for all time! Incidentally, if the author of John was so anti-Semitic, why did he write (John 4:22) in the account that's criticized as contradictory to the mission of the twelve: "You [Samaritans] worship that which you do not know; we [Jews] worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews"? But we'll have to return to that point at a later time.

#### HOW DOES GOD RECONCILE JUSTICE AND MERCY CONCERNING HIS LAW?

Conder sometimes appears to operate under the misconception that all we need to know on one subject is fully revealed in one spot of scripture. Hence, after citing Eze. 37:14 and 33:16, he comments that Jesus' blood isn't mentioned as what forgives someone in either place (MB, pp. 109, 111). But neither is so much else concerning gaining the Spirit and being forgiven--we can't expect Scripture to explain everything on one subject at every point it comes up! Again, an omission of detail (Jesus' blood as saving us from death due to our sins) does not create a contradiction. The Old Testament's prophets and believing patriarchs were saved by Jesus' death after they themselves had died. Note Hebrews 11:13, 39-40:

All these [Old Testament believers listed earlier] died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on earth. . . . And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us [Christians at the resurrection] they should not be made perfect.

Here Conder faces a major problem: How are he and those who accept his beliefs going to be saved? The OT, taken alone, certainly requires animal sacrifices for sins to be forgiven. Is Conder & Co. going to start making burnt offerings of bulls, goats, and sheep? He doesn't seem to recognize the problems in God just forgiving us while still maintaining the justice of upholding His law, and punishing its breakers. Mercy and justice were reconciled in the body of Jesus, so that God could enforce His law perfectly, yet forgive us. Is God arbitrary, enforcing His laws sometimes, and remitting violations of them at whim other times? This kind of reasoning lightly passes over a deep issue about God's character.<sup>57</sup> If Conder doesn't believe Christ's blood forgives him, and doesn't practice animal sacrifices, then how (according to the OT alone) is he forgiven? He makes a point of denying that animal sacrifices are required to forgive humans of their sins: "The Elohim of Israel is Mercy, and in Him is the SALVATION OF ISRAEL! He does not require blood, be it the blood of an animal, or the blood of a man to make His children clean" (MB, p. 129). Yet he says the animal sacrifices are still part of God's law, for he criticizes the NT for saying they are abolished since they will again be done in the millennium (MB, p. 127). However, unless he

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<sup>57</sup>Ellen White eloquently summarizes this in Desire of the Ages, pp. 672-74 [pp. 762-63, hardcover version].

still can't quite let go of some Christian theology, he ought to still believe sacrificing animals is necessary right now. After all, if God's law is totally unchanging, and if He didn't remit the commands in Leviticus, etc. requiring burnt offerings, peace offerings, and sin offerings in the later prophets, then the animal sacrifices are still required today, so far as the OT alone reveals. Conder says that God "did want the sacrifice of blood--this was never necessary for salvation" (MB, p. 129). Yet the Old Testament counters him (Lev. 17:11): "For the life of the flesh is the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement." See also Lev. 4:13-31.

Under the Old Covenant, animal sacrifices were necessary for God and men to be reconciled, or made at-one. So, if you really believe the Old Testament alone is sacred Scripture, you should be sacrificing animals today, instead of ignoring God's law to perform them, or thinking some substitute action will do when God doesn't want anything added or taken away from His law (Deut. 4:2; 12:32). Conder's theology on p. 129 of Mystery Babylon sounds suspiciously like he still accepts the argumentation of the writer of Hebrews! He cites the fortieth Psalm, just as Heb. 10:5-7 does. Has he totally thought through the implications of his new faith?

#### HOW DID JUDAS ISCARIOT DIE?

Conder maintains that the descriptions of Judas Iscariot's death contradict one another. Do they? Matthew 27:3-5 states:

Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' . . . And he threw the pieces of silver into the sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.

Then Acts 1:18-19 describes Judas's fate thus:

(Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

Obviously, someone falling down while just walking along certainly isn't enough to cause his or her guts to spill out. An added factor must be involved. It makes perfect sense to see the situation as Judas had hanged himself by a ravine, and when (perhaps) some storm's gust of wind blew on the already weakened branch from which his body hanged, it fell down and split open, perhaps after having rotted some. The area near Jerusalem that by tradition is identified as where this incident occurred even today has many trees with dead and dry branches that could break under a heavy weight in time. If this event happened in the valley of Hinnom, it has depths of around 25 to 40 feet, and some jagged rock on the valley's side could have been what caused Judas' guts to spill out. This incident again illustrates Conder's procedure of labeling the addition or omission of detail a "contradiction." Neither Matthew nor Peter's speech explicitly denies the details found in the other's account. Neither says it has the whole story by itself. In this context, I'm reminded of one incident in the church in which I asked two people separately from one another in the same family what caused another

member to be sick. The daughter very briefly said merely her mother had diabetes (which was inaccurate--later I found out it was hypoglycemia, i.e., the opposite problem of having low blood sugar levels, not high blood sugar levels). The husband gave a much longer explanation--but mentioned nothing about diabetes or any blood sugar problem. Do these two accounts contradict one another? No--it turned out each had omitted part of the picture of all the problems this poor lady had been struggling with, who really seemed to be cursed with bad health. Now--how did the "field of blood" receive its name? Notice it makes sense to see Peter's (or Luke's) statement in Acts as ironical. To paraphrase in slang English, "Judas sure did 'purchase' a piece of land--the 'burial plot' his dead body fell on." The Greek word here, "chorion," can cover the meaning of either "plot of land" or "burial plot." The "Field of Blood" (Hakeldama) may have acquired its name for both reasons, because it came at the cost of Jesus' innocent life and because of Judas's grisly end, by which he "purchased" a "plot" of land, all right, as his dead body fell on the earth. Where Judas actually died was almost certainly not where this field was located, but it could well be where he was buried. As the SDA Bible Commentary commented: "Judas' money, ill-gotten, bought the field, and his burial in it was a reward of his iniquity. . . . The difference between the accounts of Matthew and Luke is rhetorical, not factual: all Judas received as his reward was disgraceful burial in a barren piece of ground [land used by potters would become worn out--EVS]." Bible commentator Albert Barnes said the statement about Judas in Acts 1:18 didn't mean he had made a contract and paid for the land. Instead, it meant that he supplied the means, or the occasion (reason why) the field changed hands to begin with.<sup>58</sup> Simply put, it became common knowledge (Acts 1:19) that this plot of land while changing owners indirectly had cost two men their lives, including Judas'. By paying Judas to betray Christ, the Jewish leadership eventually cost both men their lives.

#### ARE THE GENEALOGIES OF CHRIST IN LUKE AND MATTHEW CONTRADICTORY OR FALSE?

Conder attacks Luke as well as Matthew over their respective genealogies of Christ (MB, pp. 26-29), saying they are "spurious" and contradictory. The basic solution to the supposed contradiction between Luke 3 and Matt. 1 is to see Matthew's tracing of Jesus' family tree as that of Joseph, who was Jesus' adoptive father, while Luke's certainly appears to point to Mary's ancestral line. Since Luke 3:23 says Jesus was "supposedly the son of Joseph" (i.e., not his real father), it points to the mother. Eli (or Heli) is actually then Joseph's father-in-law. Matthew, as befitting a Gospel intended for evangelizing the Jews in particular, traces Jesus' line back to King David. By contrast, Luke, being a gentile, wrote a "universal history" about Jesus' acts, sayings, and life. It traces Jesus' line back to Adam, the first man, the progenitor of all men, whether Jew or gentile. The wording of Matt. 1:16 obliquely points to the virgin conception and birth, because its wording is quite different from the rest of the chapter's "begats": "and to Jacob was born Joseph, the husband of Mary, by whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ." It inserts Mary in between Joseph and the mention of Jesus, calling Joseph her husband, but not saying he begat Jesus. Conder complains that such a patriarchal people as the Jews would trace the father's line, and not the mother's in genealogies, but this analysis ignores the unique circumstances of

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<sup>58</sup>Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, p. 344; Haley, Alleged Discrepancies, pp. 349-50; Nichol, ed., SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 128; Barnes as summarized in Aid to Bible Understanding, p. 48.

the virgin birth. By necessity, since no human father was actually involved, a different approach was required. Furthermore, in the case of Ruth, Sarah, and Jacob's wives, the woman's role did get attention in the OT in a general genealogical context (see Ruth 4:13-22; Gen. 11:28-31; 35:22-26). When Zelophehad had no sons, but only daughters, all their names were recorded as well, and they gained inheritances from him (Num. 26:33; 27:1-9). This leads to an interesting speculation of Wheeler's about how the royal line could be traced through a woman: "Apparently Mary was the only child of her father, and thus his rights of inheritance passed on to her--provided she married within her tribe (Numbers 36:1-9). Through Mary, that inheritance passed to Jesus." The genealogy listed in I Chron. 2:16 says Joab's mother is Zeruah, who was the sister of David, and his father is simply omitted. For other cases of women being mentioned in genealogical lists, see I Chron. 2:35, 48; 3:1-3. Citing John 6:42 and John 1:45 doesn't prove Joseph was Jesus' physical father because in both cases (especially the former) the NT is merely reporting the supposition of those speaking, even if they are inaccurate. Similarly, the NT reports the Pharisees' accusation that Jesus cast out demons by the power of Satan in Matt. 9:34: "But the Pharisees were saying, 'He casts out the demons by the ruler of demons.'" When the NT correctly reports a falsehood that was stated by Jesus' enemies, it shouldn't be accepted as actually being true!

Conder cites I Chron. 17:11-12 to argue that Jesus had to be a physical descendant of Solomon. First, this ignores the adoptive relationship in question between Joseph and Jesus, wherein legally an adoptive son becomes a son as much as a physical one. Also, v. 11 certainly points to Solomon directly, not Christ: "I will set up one of your descendants after you, who shall be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom." Solomon, one of David's actual sons, was the one who built the "house" or temple. When God says, "I will establish his throne forever," this can't refer to Solomon alone, but to David's line of descent as having someone occupying this throne, without specifying whether some descendant is of the literal descent of someone else in David's line, so long as the throne continues to be occupied. (Remember, God is speaking to David here, not Solomon). To have an everlasting throne, an immortal king is required, which will be fulfilled when he returns as king of kings and lord of lords (I Tim. 6:14-16). Saying that the genealogy of Christ found in Luke was an interpolation is simply a higher critic theory without any textual support I'm aware of. (Luke 3 is not a major focus of controversy between the partisans of the Received and Critical texts). Ferrar Fenton simply said this genealogy was contradictory to the one in Matthew, etc., and so omitted it from his translation, using interpretative presuppositions to justify a conjectural emendation in the NT's text. (Would Conder accept Fenton's rendering of Gen. 1, which is similarly motivated by a higher critic bias? It attempts to lend support to the theory of evolution by allowing the days of Genesis to be taken as long periods of time). Conder also complains that some generations are left out in Matthew's account compared to Luke's, since Luke has 27 between David and Jesus, but Luke 41. This argument ignores how the OT also contains shortened forms of genealogies that omit some ancestors in between. For example, a shortened form of Moses' pedigree is traced in Ex. 6:16-20 and Num. 26:58-59. It omits most of the generations between Moses and Levi. Jochebed, Moses' mother, is called "the daughter of Levi," which wasn't literally true, since about 350 years elapsed between when Levi the son of Jacob first arrived in Egypt and the Exodus. Rather, this lists her tribe by its eponymous ancestor after whom it was named. And in Ex. 6, the genealogy goes from Levi to Kohath to Amram to Moses, which is absurdly few for the 430 years Israel was in Egypt (see Ex.

12:40-41; Gen. 15:13). As Archer explains, this lists "a person's family tree by tribe, clan, and family group." One Chron. 7:22-27 shows that eight generations elapsed between Ephraim and Joshua, who were the respective contemporaries of Levi and Moses. A similar truncated genealogy appears in I Chron. 2:9, 18 concerning Caleb as the "son" (i.e., descendant) of Herzon. Nebuchadnezzar wasn't the "father" of Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon, since Nabonidus was, but he was his forefather (see Dan. 5:2, 11, 18). Sometimes "father" means "ancestor" in Scripture, such as where King David was called King Asa's "father" (I Kings 15:11, 24; cf. II Kings 15:38, Deut. 26:5). Some 400 years are mentioned in just three generations in I Chron. 26:24: "Shebuel the son of Gershom, the son of Moses, was officer over the treasures." Similarly, several ancestors of Ezra were omitted from the list in Ezra 7:1-5 when compared with I Chron. 6:3-15. Seraiah had to have been Ezra's great-grandfather at least, not father, since Seraiah was killed by Nebuchadnezzar, and his son Jehozadak was taken into exile (II Kings 25:18-21; I Chron. 6:14-15). Since Jeshua the high priest, Seriah's grandson, returned with Zerubbabel after seventy years of exile in Babylon, Ezra had to be of the next generation at least (Hag. 1:1; Ezra 5:2). Could the OT contradict itself about who Ezra's father was? Ezra is called "the son of Shealtiel" in Ezra 5:2, but "the son of Seraiah" in Ezra 7:1. Don't worry--this simply is a family tree out of which some ancestor(s) have been dropped. Similarly, Maacah, the mother of king Abijam, was the "daughter of Abishalom" and "the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah" (I Kings 15:2; II Chron. 13:2), which likely means one of these men was actually her grandfather. The patriarch named Cainan in Luke 3:36 is missing from the Hebrew text of the OT, but is found in the Septuagint for Gen. 10:24, 11:12-13, and I Chron. 1:18.<sup>59</sup> Since shortened genealogies are found in the OT, it's unwise to attack that feature of Christ's in Matt. 1 in the NT, which omits kings Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah from His family tree. Otherwise, Conder is hoisted by his own petard, since the OT contains foreshortened genealogies as well. The general principle to be drawn here is clear: We should not impose our own standards of accuracy upon the God's word, whether in the OT or NT, when in the culture in which it was written omitting ancestors from a family tree was understood and acceptable, not "an error" by our definitions of the words "father," "son," etc.

#### WAS GOD'S CURSE AGAINST JECONIAH LIFTED?

Does the curse against Jeconiah (or Jehoiachin) prevent Jesus of Nazareth from being the Messiah since one of his descendants couldn't sit on the throne of David? (See Jer. 22:30). Rachmiel Frydland proposes one interesting approach to this question. He maintains that the curse against Jeconiah was rescinded. For example, Jer. 22:30 said to "write this man down childless," yet he did have seven sons later on (I Chron. 3:17-18). It was said he would be "a man who will not prosper in his days," yet after being imprisoned, he was released and placed in a position over the other kings under Evil-merodach, king of Babylon. He was allowed to be in Evil-merodach's presence and given a regular daily allowance of food for the rest of his life (II Kings 25:27-30). As a result, it could be argued that this curse was at least partially lifted. So then, could the third part also have been

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<sup>59</sup>Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, pp. 111-12; John C. Whitcomb and Henry Morris, The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1961 (original publication), pp. 475-76, 481; Insight on the Scriptures, vol. 1, pp. 909-11.

rescinded, about no descendant ever being on the throne of David? Sometimes God did threaten punishment against someone, but after they repent at least some, it is delayed or eliminated (Jonah 3:4, 10; I Kings 21:21, 27, 29). Could this have happened here? The Yalkut, a medieval Jewish anthology, portrays the Jewish religious Council as being concerned scripture couldn't be fulfilled (re: Ps. 82:36) in continuing the Davidic line. So they influenced the governess, who pleaded with the queen, who then implored the king to repent. So then "Rabbi Shabatai said that [Jeconiah] did not leave prison until he repented fully and God forgave his sins and . . . his wife got pregnant as it is written, 'Shealtiel his son, Asir his son.'" While this account likely just reflects Jewish tradition, and isn't historically true, it shows even some Jews believed the curse against Jeconiah may have been lifted.

Zerubbabel, one of the leaders of the Jews returning from exile from Babylon, was a direct descendant of Jeconiah, yet he doesn't appear to have a special curse against him (see Zech. 4:7, 9-10).<sup>60</sup> HWA would not have agreed with this interpretation. When Jer. 22:30 says Jeconiah would be "childless," he took this to mean none of his children would ever sit on the throne of David, not that he would never become a father. Wheeler plausibly argues that: "Zerubbabel was only governor, not king (and the curse applies to kingship on David's throne, nothing more)."<sup>61</sup> While this all could be explained away by saying the curse was inapplicable because Jesus wasn't the physical descendant of Jeconiah since Joseph wasn't his literal father, Frydland's approach at least deserves a hearing before rejection.

#### THE GREAT TRILEMMA--JESUS CHRIST: LORD, LIAR, OR LUNATIC?

Many people, including intellectuals, hold the view that Jesus was a good man, a wise teacher, but deny that He was the God in the flesh and the Savior of humanity. Actually, He did not leave this option open to us. Jesus made claims about Himself, or allowed others to without rebuke, that implied or amounted to Deity (see John 5:18; 8:12, 58-59; 10:30-33; 11:25; 14:6; 20:28-29; Matt. 14:31-33; 23:37; 28:17-20; Mark 2:5-10). While Jesus came to bring a message from God about the kingdom of God, He also came to reveal His identity. His personal claims were far higher than any other prophet's. For example, what prophet of Jehovah ever said (John 14:6), "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me"? Is this claim false? What good is the rest of His moral teaching as found in (say) the Sermon on the Mount, when He is either a pathological liar who claims to be God when He wasn't, or a lunatic so totally divorced from reality that He believes He is Yahweh? As C.S. Lewis comments:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic--on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg--or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.

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<sup>60</sup>Rachmiel Frydland, What the Rabbis Know about the Messiah, 2d ed. (Cincinnati, OH: Messianic Publishing Co.), pp. 44-45.

<sup>61</sup>Herbert W. Armstrong, The United States and Britain in Prophecy (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1980), pp. 79-80; Wheeler, "Letter to Eric Snow," p. 6.



Similarly, historian Philip Schaff remarks:

This testimony, if not true, must be downright blasphemy or madness. The former hypothesis cannot stand a moment before the moral purity and dignity of Jesus, revealed in his every word and work, and acknowledged by universal consent. [Contrast this with the crude struggles of polytheistic gods in the Greek and Babylonian myths. Could they possibly be the sources for Christ's life?--EVS] Self-deception in a matter so momentous, and with an intellect in all respects so clear and sound, is equally out of the question. How could he be an enthusiast or a madman who never lost the even balance of his mind, who sailed serenely over all the troubles and persecutions, as the sun above the clouds, who always returned the wisest answer to tempting questions, who calmly and deliberately predicted his death on the cross, his resurrection on the third day, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the founding of his Church, the destruction of Jerusalem--predictions which have been literally fulfilled? A character so original, so complete, so uniformly consistent, so perfect, so human and yet so high above all human greatness, can be neither a fraud nor a fiction. The poet, as has been well said, would in this case be greater than the hero. It would take more than a Jesus to invent a Jesus.<sup>62</sup>

So then, when stepping back and considering the contents of the Gospels as a whole, can you honestly say the historical facts point to Jesus being either a pathological liar or an deluded lunatic? You can't, as Conder evidently does, totally evade this question, and claim the Gospels are "totally mythological in origin!" (MB, p. 148). Conder spends much more time plumbing the psyche of Simon the Sorcerer than saying anything about Christ's own motivation. Calling the Gospels "myths" doesn't make them so--they hardly read like Homer's Illiad or Odyssey. They are set in a very specific time and place--Judea under Roman rule in the late first century b.c. and the early first century A.D. If you are tempted to believe Conder is right, sit back some and try to gain some perspective on the Gospels by simply fairly rapidly reading them through in a modern translation, not pausing for long at any one place, while asking this question: "If Jesus isn't the Lord, then what evidence points to Him being either crazy or a con man?" If you can't find any such evidence, you should reconsider Conder's fundamental premises. Could someone speak the Sermon on the Mount, rebuke the ones about to stone the woman caught in adultery, praise Peter for recognizing Him as the Messiah and then immediately condemn him for saying He wouldn't be crucified, and so forth--yet either be totally deluded about His own identity or attempting to deceive others about it?<sup>63</sup> The majesty of Christ's ethics and teachings get no attention from Conder, but actually should be placed front and center for inspection. By contrast, most mystery religions were very weak in the ethics

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<sup>62</sup>C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (New York: Collier Books, Macmillan Publishing Co., 1952), p. 56; Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962 (original publication, 1910), as cited by Josh McDowell, More than a Carpenter (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1977), p. 29.

<sup>63</sup>McDowell develops this line of reasoning at length. See More than a Carpenter, pp. 25-35; Evidence That Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 103-9.

department due to focusing on immediate experience of ritual. The question then becomes, when someone like Christ was watched by so many so long during His ministry, was why His disciples' admiration never flagged, but grew, despite all the trials and opposition they encountered. Wouldn't a madman or a liar break down at some point, such as after being arrested and being put on trial for a capital offense? After all, if Christ wasn't who He said He was, what personal gain was there in being put to death? Wouldn't a con artist then beg for his very life? If he was insane--could he have put this such a facade of even-mindedness that it remained undetectable by his accusers? Christ calmly stood silent throughout much of the proceedings before Caiaphas and Pilate, which hardly fits someone who's crazy. It's time for Conder to make his choice concerning the great trilemma, and to publicly defend it since he has rejected Jesus as Lord: Is Christ a madman or a con artist? Can you reconcile either with the text of the Gospels?

#### THE PROBLEMS OF THE EMPTY TOMB AND THE RESURRECTION

The resurrection was central bedrock miracle of Christianity. Upon it Christianity rises or falls. Whether Jesus rose from the dead at the specific point and time in history determines whether Christianity is true. As Paul himself commented (I Cor. 15:13-15):

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.

Unlike the legends of Hinduism or myths about Greek gods, Christianity is a religion of history. Certain empirical facts of history have to be true, or else Christianity is a delusion. This historical approach makes it radically different from most other religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism, animism, witchcraft, etc., or philosophies such as Confucianism or Taoism. To them, history is fundamentally irrelevant to whether they have the Truth or not. They are based on theological dictums or philosophical speculations, not historical events. One well-educated Hindu, a Rama-krishna Mission teacher, thought it "seemed axiomatic that such vital matters of religious truth could not be allowed to depend upon the accidents of history. If the truths which Jesus exemplified and taught are true, then they are true always and everywhere, whether a person called Jesus ever lived or not."<sup>64</sup> Hence, Christianity can be subjected to historical investigation, verification, and falsification in ways most other religions aren't (though Islam and Judaism are similar in this regard). Conder assumes a fundamentally false premise when he compares the Gospels to pagan myths, plainly disregarding how they simply do not read like myths. He wastes a lot of effort to dredge up pagan myths to compare their events with, ultimately to no avail (see MB, pp. 32-49, 62-69). The Gospels read like truncated biographies or histories that focus on the life and teachings of one Jesus of Nazareth, who died at a specific place (Judea) and time (31 A.D.) These accounts are placed in the (then) here and now during the authors' lives and the culture out of which they came,

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<sup>64</sup>James Edward Leslie Newbigin, The Finality of Christ (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1969), p. 62, as quoted in Josh McDowell, The Resurrection Factor (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1981), p. 15.

instead of some dim past time (creation, etc.) and spiritualized place (Mount Olympus, etc.) If this aspect of the Conder thesis tempts you, it would well be worth some time and effort to read a couple hundred pages of mythology by the Greeks, Romans, Scandinavians, etc. Then compare how it "feels" compared to the Gospels. The difference should be obvious--but it may not be to those who haven't done so. So if the resurrection happened, and Jesus rose from the dead, Christianity is true, but if He didn't, Christianity is false.

Remarkably, Conder really spends very little time in debunking the resurrection. He apparently thinks that by writing off the Gospels as myths, and claiming the resurrection accounts are full of contradictions, he needn't pay them any serious heed to the historical facts found therein and attempt to explain them (note carefully MB, pp. 68-69). But, as shown above, his claims that the resurrection accounts are full of "contradictions" are based upon using the omission or addition of details to manufacture them. (I could, just as easily, create "contradictions" in the OT by pitting such books as I and II Chronicles, I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings against one another, or the "two creation accounts," which have parallel accounts of the same events. It is positively false to believe the problem of harmonizing different inspired books on the same events or people is merely limited to the NT).<sup>65</sup> Claiming the Gospels are myths places them in a literary genre that's inconceivable to the informed mind. Calling them "legends" accomplishes little either, when much of the NT, perhaps all of it, was written within one generation (40 years) of Jesus' death. Anderson concluded that it is "almost meaningless to talk about legends when you're dealing with the eyewitnesses themselves."<sup>66</sup> So now, it's time for the rubber to meet the road: Which one of the standard "explanations" by the higher critics for the resurrection should Conder believe in? Each one of them has serious flaws, and cannot be sustained against objections--which means the miraculous is the only sensible explanation for the empty tomb come Sunday morning. (A fundamental premise throughout this essay is that an almighty God exists, God is actively involved in His creation, miracles can happen, and the natural cannot always explain the natural, which makes the inference that the supernatural can and will occur rational and sensible when reliable historical witnesses say it has. Since Conder is a believer in God and miracles generically, unlike the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-76), I'm not going to address the issues raised by "God of the gaps" objectors, agnostics, atheists, etc. here). McDowell has done much work in this area, and so I'm going to freely and briefly draw from his material on the subject.<sup>67</sup> If Conder's thesis is a live question for you, consider seriously reading McDowell's material on this

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<sup>65</sup>Haley conveniently supplies a short list of these when announcing this principle, all drawn from the OT. See Alleged Discrepancies, pp. 350-51.

<sup>66</sup>Dr. J.N.D. Anderson, "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ," Christianity Today, March 29, 1968, p. 6; as cited by McDowell, Resurrection Factor, p. 81. The evidence for the first century composition of the NT was discussed earlier above, a point that administers a death blow to claims that the Gospels were myths or legends. They simply were written much too close in time to the events they describe to fit in with how works in this literary genre develop.

<sup>67</sup>McDowell, More than a Carpenter, pp. 60-77, 89-100; McDowell, Evidence That Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 179-263; McDowell, Resurrection Factor, pp. 13-103; McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 278-90.

point, and see if Mystery Babylon, pp. 65-69, can really withstand such an assault.

#### WHY DENYING THE TOMB WAS EMPTY IS IMPLAUSIBLE

Confronting the skeptic is the basic problem of explaining the fact of an empty tomb come one Sunday morning during the Days of Unleavened Bread in (most likely) 31 A.D. Apparent archeological evidence for this comes in a mangled form from the Nazareth stone the Roman government set up in Jesus' hometown. It contains an imperial edict that warns its readers against messing around with graves and tombs, with heavy punishments to match! Evidently, word about stir created by the resurrection got back to Rome in a garbled form from Pilate or someone else, resulting in this off-key response!<sup>68</sup> Attempts to deny the tomb's emptiness simply aren't believable, judging especially from the actions of the enemies of Christianity alone. Supposed you argue like Lake, that the women went to the wrong tomb, or Guignebert, that the disciples didn't know which tomb Jesus was placed in. Such claims are shot down by the reactions of the authorities themselves amidst the commotion created by the disciples' preaching from Pentecost on in Judea and elsewhere. They would have done some elementary investigation, such as by asking Joseph of Arimathea (a member of the Sanhedrin himself) where his tomb was, and the matter would have been quickly disposed of. Anyway, would have the Romans guarded the wrong tomb? Simply producing the body of Jesus, perhaps presenting it on an ox cart by rolling it down the main streets of Jerusalem, would have strangled Christianity in the cradle. Who could believe that Jesus had risen just after seeing His dead body? The preaching about Christianity's claims did not begin in some place far from where Jesus Himself had lived, such as Athens, where checking up on the claims of His followers would have been difficult. Furthermore, statements by hostile or unsympathetic witnesses in the NT (which is the strongest kind of historical evidence there is--concessions to the enemy) show the Jewish leadership knew the tomb was empty, and that they didn't know where the body of Jesus was. Why else would have they have bribed the guards at the tomb to spread the story that (Matt. 28:11): "His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep"?<sup>69</sup> Instead, they would have said, "We know where the

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<sup>68</sup>Michael Green, Man Alive (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), p. 36, as cited by McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, p. 218.

<sup>69</sup>The guards in question almost certainly were Romans, not the Temple guard, unlike what Conder maintains (MB, p. 68). Would have the elders of the Jews bribed their own temple guard? Furthermore, since the standard penalty in the Roman legions for falling asleep while on guard duty was death, it would make sense the soldiers in question would appeal to the Jewish leadership (someone outside the line of command) to save their skins. Appealing to any Roman officer or leader would surely be of no avail, and a swift, summary death would soon be their fate. Conder's argument that Jewish guards couldn't be bribed into lying about the Messiah is actually an excellent argument in favor of the guard being Roman. (Thanks!) The dispute over the composition of the guard is based on Pilate's positive response to the chief priests and Pharisees' request to have a guard placed on Jesus' tomb to prevent the disciples from stealing the body and claiming Jesus was resurrected. Note Matt. 28:65: "Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how.'" If this command is in the imperative, it would mean (as Alford has said) "Take a body of men for a guard." This would make more sense, since the Jews wouldn't be asking Pilate for a guard had they

body is, and we'll show it to you now." Consider the implications of Gamaliel's fence-straddling statement that we can't be certain if this movement is of God or of men, so we should be careful about punishing these men for preaching about Jesus (Acts 5:34-40). It would be inconceivable to say this if the body of Jesus could be shown to people and/or was in the possession of the Jewish leadership. Obviously, Gamaliel simply didn't know where it was, nor his friends on the Sanhedrin, so he counseled caution. Anyway, could have the women or the disciples have all gone to the wrong tomb? Would have they forgotten where their loved one lay?

#### WERE THE RESURRECTION APPEARANCES HALLUCINATIONS?

Were the resurrection appearances mere hallucinations? This is another way to contend the tomb was occupied by Jesus' body, while still trying to explain what transformed the behavior of the disciples from cowards cowering in hiding into men who could only be silenced by death. This theory suffers from numerous deadly flaws, the biggest of which is those who suffer from hallucinations imagine what they expect to see and desire to see. However, the disciples plainly were NOT anticipating Jesus to rise from the dead, and even afterwards, according to the NT itself, still had doubts. They had expected Jesus to be the Conquering Messiah who would overthrow the Romans, and then install them as His top lieutenants under His rule (Matt. 18:1; 20:20-28; Mark 9:33-35; Luke 22:24-30). The disciples had a long, hard time unlearning the prevailing Jewish view of what the Messiah would do when He appeared. (However, they had at least some glimmer that Jesus would come again, judging from their question in Matt. 24:3). It took the crucifixion and the resurrection to pound it out of them. Indeed, even then there was a delayed response, for they did not understand the truth that the Messiah came the first time to suffer and die for humanity's sins, not the rule the earth then, under some time after Jesus' resurrection (note Acts 1:6-8). They repeatedly refused to believe or even understand His prophecies of His own impending crucifixion and resurrection. Christ praised Peter for saying He was the Messiah, but then blasted him for refusing to believe that: "He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day" (Matt. 16:21; cf. Mark 9:31; Luke 9:22-26; Luke 17:25; Matt. 17:12, 19, 22-23; 20:17-19). Jesus on another occasion told His disciples (Mark 9:31): "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later." The NT then witnesses that the disciples didn't understand this. (This incident illustrates how it again and again reveals the imperfections and flaws of the founders of Christianity under Jesus, showing it was hardly a mindlessly partisan document). "And they understood none of these things, and this saying was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said" (Luke 18:34). The NT repeatedly notes the lack of faith the disciples had about Jesus'

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intended to use the temple guards to begin with. Furthermore, the Greek word translated guard, "koustodian," which is taken from Latin, really has a weight towards meaning some detachment of Roman troops, especially the guard unit of a Roman legion. Then, if the troops were Temple guards, which were under the full control of the Jewish leadership, there would have been no need to say (Matt. 28:14) "if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble," since Pilate would have no direct control over them. See McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, pp. 210-214; McDowell, Resurrection Factor, pp. 54-55.

resurrection, including even after it happened! (See Matt. 28:17; Mark 16:11, 13; Luke 24:11, 41; John 20:25). The resurrected Christ rebuked them for their unbelief (Mark 16:14): "And after He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen." The disciples were not going to hallucinate about something--the resurrected Christ--that they didn't really believe would happen to begin with. When the women carried the spices to the tomb early Sunday morning, they obviously expected to find Jesus dead, not alive!

Other problems abound with the hallucination theory. Normally hallucinations only afflict the paranoid and (especially) the schizophrenic. These psychological labels hardly describe the disciples, with hard-headed fishermen and a former tax collector among them. Such men, including the rather cynical and skeptical Philip, the initially disbelieving Thomas who demanded decisive empirical evidence that he could not only just see, but touch, are not the types prone to hallucinations. They also are highly individualized occurrences--it's absurd to posit that two people, let alone groups of them, would have the same hallucination. Paul maintained some 500 saw the resurrected Jesus (I Cor. 15:6). Did they all hallucinate the same thing? Neurobiologist Raoul Mourgue maintained that hallucinating "is not a static phenomenon but essentially a dynamic process, the instability of which reflects the very instability of the factors and conditions associated with its origin." The appearances of the resurrected Christ were sustained close encounters, which included Him eating dinner with the disciples, His invitations for the disciples to touch him, His speaking with them, and appearing under difference circumstances before different people (Luke 24:39-43; Matt. 28:9-10; John 20:25-27). If they were only hallucinations, wouldn't some have suddenly realized that they were only seeing things part way through the encounter? When normal people are uncertain of what one sense tells them--when they suspect they are hallucinating--they examine what their other senses are telling them as a check. Psychiatrists Hinsie and Shatsky have noted that "in a normal individual this false belief usually brings the desire to check often another sense or other senses may come to the rescue and satisfy him that it is merely an illusion."<sup>70</sup> Jesus' resurrection appearances involved all three major cognitive senses, not just sight. All these factors decisively militate against believing hallucinations could explain how the disciples' behavior was so utterly transformed almost literally overnight.

#### DID THE DISCIPLES STEAL THE BODY?

Once the truth of an empty tomb is established, how can it be explained? One standard explanation, which Matthew himself alludes to (Matt. 28:13; 27:63), claims that the disciples stole the body, concealed it, and proclaimed Jesus was alive. What problems does this face? First, consider the Roman guard the Jewish authorities so thoughtfully placed around the tomb, complete with the imperial seal (Matt. 27:62-66). The Roman guards were extremely capable soldiers. The death penalties threatened upon those slept while on watch produced discipline and, according to the historian Dr. George Currie, a

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<sup>70</sup>As summarized by Heinrich Kluerer in Paul H. Hoch, Joseph Zubin, and Grhune Stratton, eds., Psychopathology of Perception (New York: n.p., 1965), p. 18; L.E. Hinsie and J. Shatsky, Psychiatric Dictionary (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 280; both as cited by McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 249, 250.

"faultless attention to duty, especially during the night watch."<sup>71</sup> One of these trained professional soldiers, let alone two or three, could have easily dispatched all eleven disciples if they approached the tomb with the intent of stealing the body. Second, as alluded to above, the disciples had fled and hid when Jesus was arrested (Matt. 26:56). Later, even impetuous Peter, fearful of being recognized as one of Jesus' followers, he denied Him three times. Could have such frightened, disorganized men, who did not expect or really believe Jesus was to rise to begin with, be able to even plan such a heist, let alone pull off such a would-be brilliant coup? With their Messiah dead on the cross, they obviously thought their grand hopes for a future of ruling the world under Him were equally defunct. Third, the testimony of their lives morally points to the impossibility of them being such intentional deceivers. They had their moral flaws, as the NT makes plain (showing its objectivity, just as the OT reveals the flaws of such men as David, Jacob, and Abraham), especially before conversion, but pulling off such a vast intentional deceit would be totally out of character for them. Fourth, there's always this issue: Would these men die for a lie that they knew was a lie? Wouldn't one or more of them, when given the chance, deny Jesus rose from the dead when put on trial for their lives? (In Pliny the Younger's message to the Emperor Trajan, as well as when Polycarp was martyred, the Christians in question were given the chance to save their lives, if they would deny Christ. The Romans generally were not out to kill Christians for the sake of killing them, but sought to bring them back into civic loyalty and paganism through repenting enough to sacrifice to the emperor and/or deny Jesus). By tradition, eleven of the twelve apostles died martyrs. What good is dying for some cause you know is false, when no personal gain is possible from continuing to uphold it, and by abandoning it, you could save your life? (This whole point has ominous implications for Conder's fanciful reconstruction of Simon the Sorcerer's life and fate--see MB, pp. 131-39). Fifth, even if the guards did fall asleep, could have they have remained so when the disciples had to tiptoe past them and move the tomb's covering stone? It likely weighed between one and a half to two tons! Such commotion would require total deafness on part of the guards--who may have been 16 in number. All these objections make the ancient Jewish claim that the disciples stole the body insufferably implausible.

#### THE SWOON THEORY WEIGHED AND FOUND WANTING

Another attempted naturalistic (non-supernatural) explanation for the resurrection is to maintain Jesus did NOT actually die on the cross, but merely fainted. Then after being entombed, he revived in its cool air. This theory ignores the masses of evidence that point to Jesus' death which makes it impossible to believe He was actually still alive. First, Jesus was scourged. This was not a mere whipping with (say) a standard horse or bull whip, but likely involved one or more leather cords or thongs attached to a handle, sometimes with pieces of metal or bones being weighted or knotted in to make it more effective in cutting the flesh. The standard scourging, according to the early church historian Eusebius, laid bare the victim's veins and "the very muscles, sinews, and bowels of the victim were open to exposure." So Jesus was already greatly weakened when He was nailed onto the cross, which His evident inability to carry the beam of His cross (or stake?)

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<sup>71</sup>George Currie, The Military Discipline of the Romans from the Founding of the City to the Close of the Republic, pp. 41-43; as cited in McDowell, Resurrection Factor, p. 93.

to His place of execution indicates (Luke 23:26). Crucifixion victims, even when rescued from the cross before death overtook them, seldom lived. The Romans crucified three of Josephus's friends during their quelling of the 66-70 A.D. revolt in Judea. Josephus appealed to Titus, the Roman general in charge (and future emperor) to have them taken down. Although his request was granted, two of them still died shortly thereafter. The Roman soldiers serving as executioners were presumably experienced in knowing what dead men looked like. They found Jesus was dead already, but, by contrast, the two thieves crucified with Him weren't (John 19:32-33): "The soldiers therefore came, and broke the legs of the first man, and of the other man who was crucified with Him; but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs." They broke the legs of the thieves to bring a sudden end to their lives. Since crucifixion victims need the support of their legs, otherwise asphyxiation soon followed because by their arm strength alone they couldn't keep lifting themselves up to breathe for long. But this treatment wasn't necessary for Jesus. Why? Because in a statement that should be seen as a parenthetical comment by John in v. 34: "but one of the soldiers [had] pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water." Then, compare it to Matt. 27:49-50 in the Moffatt translation: "(Seizing a lance, another pricked [pierced] his side, and out came water and blood.) Jesus again uttered a loud scream, and gave up his spirit." Part of verse 49 is missing in most major translations (though it is in Moffatt's and Fenton's). But actually it has reasonable manuscript support: It's found in Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, as well as Codex Ephraemi, L, 5, 48, 67, 115, 127, 1010, five good copies of the Latin Vulgate, the Jerusalem Syriac (Aramaic), and the Ethiopic. Normally, this manuscript support would be enough to earn it a place in the critical text (of Westcott-Hort, etc.). But translators evidently omit it because John appears to contradict Matthew about whether the spear was thrown into Jesus' back before or after His death. The "contradiction" can easily be resolved by noting John was using an aorist past tense (which in the Greek language refers to something having occurred at one point in time in the past, or at widely separated points in time) in a parenthetical comment. Therefore, Jesus was dramatically slain by a spear while still alive, which quickly ended His sufferings after being on the cross for about six hours, while the soldiers instead simply broke the legs of the thieves to hasten their untimely ends.<sup>72</sup>

There's still more evidence that Jesus was dead. Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for Jesus' body. Pilate summoned the centurion who presided over the crucifixion and after asking "whether He [Jesus] was already dead," handed over Jesus' corpse to Joseph (Mark 15:43-45). Along with Nicodemus's help, who supplied some hundred pounds of spices to be wrapped underneath the body's burial linen, Joseph laid it in a new tomb he owned (John 19:38-42). Not only the Roman common soldiers had determined that Jesus was dead, but their officer along with Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus did as well. Even IF Jesus hadn't died from being scourged, crucified, and speared, the traditional Jewish practice of tightly wrapping dead bodies with linen, placing spices underneath, with a sticky, gummy substance holding it all together, surely would have finished the job via suffocation. He would have had no food or water, or medical help for His wounds, for three days and three nights. Then, with the boulder having been rolled against the tomb's entrance, He would have received no fresh air, for the tomb was soon filled with the odor of the

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<sup>72</sup>See the WCG reprint article, "Did Christ Die of a Broken Heart?," 1959, 1972, pp. 3-5.



spices. The swoon theory also faces further problems: Could have a bloody, wounded, weakened man not only unwrap himself, but push open the tomb's boulder? The women who arrived at the tomb Sunday morning "saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large" (Mark 16:4). Anyway, could have Jesus gotten by and/or overcome the soldiers guarding the tomb? Then, could have a battered, wounded man appearing before His disciples have transformed them from cowering in fright to men no one could silence without killing them? As Keim said, cited by Thorburn:

Then there is the most impossible thing of all; the poor, weak Jesus, with difficulty holding Himself erect, in hiding, disguised, and finally dying--this Jesus an object of faith, of exalted emotion, of the triumph of His adherents, a risen conqueror, and Son of God! Here, in fact, the theory begins to grow paltry, absurd, worthy only of rejection.

The accounts of the risen Jesus passing through walls and suddenly appearing and disappearing (Luke 24:36-37; Mark 16:4; John 19:4; 20:1), able to conceal His identity at will (Luke 24:31), etc., hardly fits with the Swoon theory's view of Jesus undergoing a mere resuscitation. David Strauss, a higher critic who sharply attacked the Gospels' supernatural aspects, still saw the Swoon theory as absurd. He trashed it with these words:

It is impossible that a being who has been stolen half-dead out of the sepulchre, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment; who required bandaging, strengthening and indulgence, and who still at last yielded to his sufferings, could have given to the disciples the impression that he was a Conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life, an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry. Such a resuscitation could only have weakened the impression which He had made upon them in life and in death, at the most could only have given it an elegiac voice, but could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, have elevated their reverence into worship.<sup>73</sup>

The theory that Jesus merely spontaneously recovered physically in the tomb is the sheerest nonsense. It's amazing that it once was a major way eighteenth-century Enlightenment scholars attempted to explain away the resurrection naturalistically, without evoking miracles. Conder's ideas concerning Simon the Sorcerer trying to reenact the crucifixion before the emperor Nero becomes the worst kind of poppycock when considering such objections. Would anybody allow nails to be driven into their hands (wrists) and feet in order to engage in some elaborate stunt? (see MB, pp. 138-39)

HOW IS THE TRANSFORMED BEHAVIOR OF THE DISCIPLES TO BE EXPLAINED OTHERWISE?

In any attempt to explain away the resurrection, the transformed behavior of the disciples must always be reckoned with. These men fled when Jesus was arrested. The leading disciple, Simon Peter, denied Jesus three

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<sup>73</sup>Thomas James Thorburn, The Resurrection Narratives and Modern Criticism (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1910), pp. 183-85; as cited by McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, p. 233; David Friedrich Strauss, The Life of Jesus for the People, vol. 1, 2d ed. (London: William & Norgate, 1879), p. 412; as cited by McDowell, Resurrection Factor, pp. 98-99.

times upon the mere casual questioning by others around him. They hid away, afraid that the Jewish leadership would claim their lives, just as it had Jesus'. But then, suddenly, within fifty-four days of Jesus' death, they went into Jerusalem's streets preaching Jesus as the Messiah, repeatedly publicly accusing their fellow Jews of killing the Messiah (Acts 2:23, 36; 3:13-15; 4:10). These simple men, fishermen, etc., even withstood the commands of their nation's top leaders on the Sanhedrin to stop preaching in Jesus' name.

Peter defiantly replied to them: "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross." THIS--from the man who some weeks earlier was so frightened he denied Jesus to a mere servant girl? (Luke 22:56) Why the change? The disciples, if they were lying, knew it was a lie. Could have a lie that they knew was a lie, have so utterly transformed their lives? Furthermore, being (post-Pentecost at least) fundamentally upright men upholding a religion that prohibited lying have engaged in such deceit? Would you die for a lie, knowing that admitting it would save your life? For the Romans often offered Christians their lives on the condition of denying Jesus and/or offer the pinch of incense to the emperor as a god. It's hard to believe that none of them would break down under pressure if they had concocted such a gigantic lie.<sup>74</sup> By tradition, eleven of the twelve apostles paid for their beliefs with their lives, with only John dying naturally. SOMETHING happened to so utterly change these men's psychology so quickly. What was it, if not the miracle of their leader, the Messiah, coming to back to life?

#### CONDER'S ATTACKS ON THE NT'S RELIABILITY FAULTY

Now having considered Conder's criticisms of the New Testament as a contradictory, ahistorical document, what has survived? Above, the NT has been shown to be historically reliable, and that its supposed "contradictions" within in are nothing of the kind. The discoveries of archeology and the preserved writings of various pagan historians generally do accord with the text. Any remaining discrepancies are something apt even by secular criteria to be resolved in the NT's favor in the future, similar to how for the OT in more recent years at least some archeologists have reconsidered the dates of Jericho's fall that had conflicted with its chronology.<sup>75</sup> The canon was shown

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<sup>74</sup>Conder asks: "[Joseph] Smith offers a list of eyewitnesses to the claims he makes for the Book of Mormon. Now, with these witnesses and the word of the 'prophet' Joseph Smith, I ask you, why do the majority of Christians not accept his testimony?" (MB, p. 63). However, the witnesses to Jesus' resurrection present a stark contrast to those testifying to the Book of Mormon. Of two groups of witnesses listed at the beginning of this book, the three witnesses and the eight witnesses, only the three Smiths, members of the same family as Joseph Smith, remained in the LDS church until the end of their lives. All three of the three witnesses, who supposedly had seen an angel show them the plates that Joseph Smith allegedly translated the Book of Mormon from, later had visions that contradicted what Smith had received. Joseph Smith himself later called all eight of the defectors liars and cheats "too mean to mention," and accused two of the three witnesses of being part of a "gang of counterfeiters, thieves, liars and blacklegs." See Dave Hunt and Ed Decker, The God Makers (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1984), pp. 102-3.

<sup>75</sup>See The Bible: God's Word or Man's? (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1989), pp. 49-53; Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, pp. 156-57, 195-96.

to be not formed by papal decrees or choices by synods of bishops, but came from the everyday practice of the churches as a whole. The NT's text can be determined to be reliable, and what disputed variations that do exist between the critical and received texts do not place any significant teachings of Christianity at risk. The idea the NT was written entirely by pagan Greeks, not Jews, simply doesn't reckon with this document's Semitic flavor in its language and background, even though Greek was used in its composition. Conder anachronistically reads back the medieval Christian church's teachings and corruption to the pre-313 A.D. Sunday-keeping church, which is hardly good history. Does anyone honestly believe, given the above documentation, that we should place our faith in Conder's higher critic scholarship, when conservative Christian criticisms undermine it badly? Furthermore, the same means of argumentation he uses against the NT which he picked up from these scholars can also be used against the OT, such as the argument from silence and the assumption nothing supernatural (from God) could have led to its writing. He also fails to reckon with the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and the majesty of Christian ethics, so different from the run of pagan mystery religions! It's time for Conder to explain how he thinks the resurrection accounts came to be, for calling them "myths" will not succeed with anyone who has read any significant amount of mythological writings, and so knows the difference from historical writing. It's time for Conder also to make a choice out of the great trilemma. He has to explain who and what Jesus was--if He wasn't the Lord, He had to be a deceiver or a madman--and give the evidence from the pages of the NT for his choice. He should also reply to standard conservative/fundamentalist Christian scholarship--his footnotes hardly refer to any of it, even in reply. Conder writes that he has "just counted 47 books on Christian defense here in my private library."<sup>76</sup> Their contents sure don't seem to have much effect on Mystery Babylon, since he rarely states their arguments (except perhaps when dealing with alleged contradictions in the NT), and they almost never appear in his footnotes. Those tempted by Conder to believe the NT is historically inaccurate, contradictory, etc. need to be open minded and to research the other side of the question, and avoid assuming he has the final word.

## 2. CHARGES THAT PAGANISM INFLUENCED EARLY CHRISTIANITY MADE BY UNINFORMED

A centerpiece of Conder's claims against early Christianity is that it got its ideas directly from the Roman Empire's pagan thought, especially from its mystery religions, but also from Gnosticism and pagan philosophy. In the quoted extract below, Conder concocts some scenario in which Simon Magus was supposedly the originator of Christianity, and so writes he preached to Romans ideas like these:

Simon presented his theology in a package known as Gnosticism, which was a combination of different religious thought--including platonic philosophy. . . . the title of Logos was directly from the theological philosophy of Plato, and Christus had a disgusting phallic meaning that was intrinsic to the Mysteries" (MB, p. 137).

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<sup>76</sup>"Vance Stinson Letter," Masada, spring 1997, p. 33. The one place where he cites such works is on MB, p. 41, where he refers to Floyd McElveen and John H. Gerstner.

He sensationally claims:

Snared in what? The jumble of Christian theology, which is one and the same as the traditions of Baal: the savior-god who was born of a virgin, whose flesh must be eaten and whose blood must be tasted to obtain salvation, and who was crucified at the spring equinox and rose on the day of the Venerable Sun! (MB, p. 94)

So then, was first-century Christianity influenced by paganism? It's important to realize that such charges are dead issues among contemporary scholars in the fields of classics and Biblical studies. Seeing parallels between the ideas of (say) Gnosticism or Mithraism and Christianity were common from about 1890 to 1940, but are rarely circulated today except by the uninformed. The Swedish scholar H. Riesenfeld labeled appealing to the mystery religions as having influenced early Christianity as outdated even in 1956.<sup>77</sup> William Craig, a professor of philosophy at Westmont College, who has earned two doctorates in studies related to the pagan mystery religions and Hellenistic/Greek myths, recently stated: "I know of no reputable New Testament scholar or historian today who would any longer defend the view that the Christian ideas of the resurrection were derived from parallels of pagan religions." So when H.G. Wells saw parallels between Mithraism and the language used by Paul about the crucifixion in his history of the world, The Outline of History, originally published just after WWI, his book reflected its day and age.<sup>78</sup> This section will examine Conder's claims in this order: First, three standard ways by which Christianity is illegitimately charged with being directly influenced by the mystery religions are described, which involve ignoring chronology, making superficial comparisons that fail to really probe the symbolic meanings of the pagans' rituals, and trying to say all pagan practices are ultimately traceable to a common source. Also some of the standard differences between Christianity and the mystery religions are summarized. Then, many of Conder's charges that Christianity was directly dependent on the mystery religions' beliefs are examined in the time order of Jesus' ministry, from the miracles, to the Passover ceremony being instituted, and finally His death and resurrection.

#### IGNORING CHRONOLOGY IN ORDER TO SAY MITHRAISM INFLUENCED EARLY CHRISTIANITY

To press home the charge first-century Christianity was influenced by ancient pagan religions, normally chronology is ignored. For example, Conder asserts: "It is very significant that in first century Rome the worship of Mithra was the most popular of all the versions of the Mysteries" (MB, p. 32;

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<sup>77</sup>Ronald H. Nash, The Gospel and the Greeks: Did the New Testament Borrow from Pagan Thought? (Richardson, TX: Probe Books, 1992), pp. 9-10, 116-19. H. Riesenfeld, "Mythological Background of New Testament Christology," in W.D. Davis and D. Daube, eds., The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), pp. 81-95; as cited in Nash, Gospel and the Greeks, p. 273. For more on this general subject, but in a briefer form than Nash's work, see McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 175-97.

<sup>78</sup>Craig in a lecture given in Peoria, IL, as quoted in McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, p. 283; H.G. Wells, The Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind, ed. Raymond Postgate (Garden City, NY: Garden City Books, 1956 (1920, original publication), vol. 1, pp. 430-32.

cf. pp. 73, 110). But this is simply false! Mithraism had little presence within the Roman Empire in the first century, especially in its first half, and so for that reason alone simply could not have been a major influence on early Christianity's development. This fact at one blow destroys much of Conder's thesis that early Christianity was influenced by the mystery religions, such as how the birth narratives about Jesus were supposedly lifted from Mithraism (MB, pp. 32-33, 37, 136). Scholar M.J. Vermaseren has stated: "No Mithraic monument can be dated earlier than the end of the first century A.D., and even the more extensive investigations at Pompeii, buried beneath the ashes of Vesuvius in A.D. 79, have not produced a single image of the god." Historian Edwin Yamauchi maintained after extensive investigation: "Apart from the visit of the Armenian King, who was a worshiper of Mithra, to Nero, there is no evidence of the penetration of Mithra to the west until the end of the first century A.D."<sup>79</sup> Even Fox, no friend of Christianity, states that: "The last new pagan god, Mithras, was introduced to the Latin West by the late first century A.D." Widengren has argued that a Mithraeum uncovered by archeologists in Dura-Europos on the Euphrates River (in the east!) was built c. 80-85 A.D. But even he admits the evidence for this date is "very uncertain;" Vermaseren and others suggest 168 A.D. based on excavation reports. Mithraism's origins lay in Persia, an area never conquered by Rome, and it spread due to Roman soldiers carrying back this faith from campaigns in the east. And Rome only held Mesopotamia and Armenia very briefly (respectively, 115-17 A.D. and 114-17 A.D.) The cult's greatest strength always was in the Roman army. The military ethos of those who propagated Mithraism made it an unlikely source of influence on Christianity, since the early Christians were pacifists who refused to wage war. So, unless Conder has access to historical or archeological evidence these contemporary scholars are unaware of, claiming Mithraism had major influence on Rome--and therefore, on Christianity--in the first century is simply a historical falsehood.<sup>80</sup>

Conder asserts that Mithraism was assimilated by the Catholic church with

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<sup>79</sup>M.J. Vermaseren, Mithras: The Secret God (London: Chatto and Windus, 1963), p. 29; Edwin M. Yamauchi, Pre-Christian Gnosticism, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), p. 112; as quoted in McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, p. 192. The main argument for a pre-first century establishment of Mithraism in Rome is a reference in Plutarch, the Greek biographer who wrote in Latin. He once mentions that the Roman general Pompey captured some Cilician pirates that practiced Mithraism and other mystery rites. Some of them were (likely) hauled back to Rome as prisoners to display as trophies of his military success, which occurred in 67 B.C. However, this is a far cry from saying the cult had an independent establishment among the average people of Rome or Italy in the century before Christ, which Plutarch doesn't state here or elsewhere. While Samuele Bacchiocchi presses for an earlier establishment of Mithraism in Rome, his sources appear to mainly lean upon the Cilician pirate reference in Plutarch. See From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1977), pp. 240-41.

A rather persistent pattern I've seen in looking up references on this subject is that the later the reference was written in this century, the later the author thinks Mithraism was established in Rome!

<sup>80</sup>Fox, Pagans and Christians, p. 29; See the discussion in Nash, The Gospel and the Greeks, pp. 146-47.

its savior-god simply be[coming] a virgin-born deity renamed Jesus the Christ. . . . By relating other deeds of Mithra before his death and resurrection and comparing them to Jesus' deeds [the extent of assimilation can be understood]. They included healing the sick, raising the dead, giving sight to the blind, and making the lame walk. (MB, p. 33)

These claims face an enormous problem. According to Nash, "Mithraism had no concept of the death and resurrection of its god."<sup>81</sup> Unless Conder can produce citations from the original myths describing Mithra directly that prove this, he evidently has been misled by Walker, Doane, etc. or perhaps by late developments in Mithraism in later centuries in which it began to pick up ideas from the Christians. Conder asserts that Mithra was "a deity, who was a 'messiah,' was born of a virgin, had a king trying to kill him (who then slaughtered innocent babies), fled to Egypt, had three wise men visit him, had twelve disciples, ate a 'last supper' with these disciples." I challenge him to him to prove, by quoting and citing the legends directly themselves, not from potentially biased secondary sources such as Walker, Doane, et al., that indeed Mithra did all these things, according to the legends as circulated in or before the second century, not in later centuries. From the third century on, as Christianity became a more formidable competitor, the pagans may have begun to lift ideas out of it in order to win more recruits or to avoid the loss of current ones. This possibility makes it rather hazardous to read the later versions of any myths about Mithra, etc. back into the first century and earlier.

#### IGNORING CHRONOLOGY TO "PROVE" CHRISTIANITY'S DEPENDENCE ON THE MYSTERIES

When drawing parallels between Christianity and the mystery religions, skeptics have one standard technique that ignores the crude basic of historical reasoning, that something has to occur before something else in order to cause a later thing to happen. They read back from something done by a pagan religion in a later century to the first century and say it influenced the first-century church, such as saying communion (the Passover ceremony) was similar to Mithraism's ceremonial meals. Actually, as Nash observes, no one knowledgeably can draw any solid parallels because so little is known about the sacred meals of the pagan cults and the meanings they themselves applied to them. This point deals a deadly blow to Conder's analysis of the Christian Passover (MB, pp. 44-49). It's much more sensible to see the origin of the Passover ceremony (communion) in the Old Testament, in its symbol of the lamb being sacrificed (cf. John 1:36; Ex. 12:4-7, 12-13), and its blood protecting Israel during the slaying of the Egyptians' firstborn. The NT clearly refers back to the OT's Passover when Jesus instituted the Christian Passover ceremony since this it was instituted on this day (Matt. 26:17-19; John 13:1, 29). Another example of this technique evidently appears in one quote by Conder of Walker (note MB, p. 110, "'born again for eternity.'") There is an inscription dated from 376 A.D. that says in Latin, "reborn for eternity in the taurobolium and criobolium." Skeptics somehow think this fourth-century expression of pagan thinking proves first-century Christianity was influenced in its idea of spiritual begetting by these two pagan rituals that sacrificed bulls and sheep. But by the late fourth century, with Christianity on the sharp rise following the Edict of Milan (313 A.D.) by Emperor Constantine,

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<sup>81</sup>Nash, Gospel and the Greeks, p. 147.

pagans easily could have gotten this idea from Christianity instead! After all, since they had a non-exclusive view of the truth (versus John 14:6 and Acts 4:12), they were not be averse to swiping ideas from their competition, and using them for their own ends to stem the loss of recruits! Similarly, (as implied in MB, pp. 110-1) saying the Christian idea of baptism came from the taurobolium (which is explained more below) ignores how the earliest records of this ceremony come from the second century. Even Laing, who is quite willing to draw parallels between Christianity and the mystery religions, admits: "The earliest known taurobolic inscription is dated A.D. 133, but Paul had preached the doctrine that men must be born again long before." According to Wagner, "the taurobolium in the Attis cult is first attested in the time of Antoninus Pius for A.D. 160." The taurobolium, which was developed by the cult of Attis and Cybele (the Great Mother), apparently was first practiced about a century after Paul wrote his epistles by the latter reckoning. Hence, saying Christianity got the idea of a "blood baptism" or spiritual begettal from a pagan ceremony that sacrificed bulls ignores chronology, and reads something from the second and later centuries back into the first century, when the NT was written. And there's no way something that developed among pagan religions after 100 A.D. could have influenced the contents of the New Testament, which was written before that date, as shown above.<sup>82</sup>

#### THE NEED TO BE SPECIFIC WHEN COMPARING BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND PAGANISM

Conder's case fundamentally is based upon drawing superficial similarities between various pagan religions and Christianity. Normally, the more specific about the legends in question about (say) a dying god or rites of a mystery religion anyone is, the less apparent are likenesses to Christianity. Then when the meanings of the myth or ceremony in question are analyzed, Conder's case largely evaporates. For example (see MB, p. 66 for Conder's use of this), in the mystery religion of Cybele and Attis, Attis became alive after dying, but to call this a "resurrection" artificially applies Christian terminology to force an parallel. In the legend, Attis's body was preserved, his hair would grow, and a finger would move--and that was it. In another version of the myth, he just became an evergreen tree. His death was very different from Christ's: In one version of the legend, he was killed by a boar, and in the other he bled to death after mutilating himself under a pine tree. He certainly didn't die for humanity's sins! Furthermore, initially, the followers of the cult of Attis and Cybele rehearsed the myth's events in order to ensure a good crop, and only later this developed into a means by which cult's devotees sought to share in Attis's immortality. Gunter Wagner, who maintained the myth of Attis was exclusively an initiation-myth, says it had nothing to do with resurrection or death: "In its various forms, from the oldest traditions right down to the versions received in the fourth century A.D., the Attis myth knows nothing of a resurrection of Attis. The Attis of the myth is not a dying and rising god." While an ambiguous passage in the ancient author Firmicus Maternus (which Conder refers to in a footnote--p. 66, fn. 6) could be interpreted as saying Attis was personally

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<sup>82</sup>Gordon J. Laing, Survivals of Roman Religion (New York: Cooper Square, 1963), p. 125; Gunter Wagner, Pauline Baptism and the Pagan Mysteries (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1967), p. 266; as quoted in Nash, The Gospel and the Greeks, pp. 142, 154. On chronology and the taurobolium, see Nash, pp. 142-43, 153-56, 176-78. On the alleged influence of Mithraism's sacred meal on Christian communion, see Nash, pp. 158-59.

raised from the dead, this is highly disputable. This passage also is very late (fourth century A.D.) and (Nash) "appears inconsistent with known elements of the cult," which makes it of questionable reliability.<sup>83</sup> Evidently, calling the final day of the spring-time festivities of the devotees of Attis and Cybele the "resurrection of Attis" artificially places a label upon the proceedings that the standard versions of the myth won't sustain.<sup>84</sup>

#### WAS THE TAUROBOLIUM, A PAGAN RITE, A SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE?

The taurobolium is another case of superficial similarities between a pagan rite and a Christian ceremony being used to say the latter came from the former (compare the astrological sign of the bull, "Taurus"). Did the taurobolium influence the Christian doctrines of baptism and/or atonement? In this ceremony a bull was killed on top of a pit which had boards covering it.

Below, the pagan believers would stand or sit, and move around to try to get the blood from it to drip on them. Conder claims that Christianity got its doctrine of the forgiveness of sins by the shedding of blood at least in part from the taurobolium, which gave Christianity the symbol of the bull (generally changed to a lamb) for Jesus' role as a sacrifice for humanity. He quotes Walker's citation of Angus, who writes (evidently concerning the consecration of a high priest, not a group of devotees): "he moistened his tongue with the blood, which he then drank as a sacramental act" (MB, pp. 110-11). As already discussed above, the cult of Attis and Cybele only began to practice this ritual in the second century (Mithraism picked it up later on).

So chronology, for starters, bars this ritual from influencing the first-century church or the NT. Did Christianity get its symbol of the lamb for Jesus from this rite, after changing it from the bull? This claim ignores the Old Testament's animal sacrifices and their meaning in forgiving sins. (Conder glosses this point over on MB, pp. 129-30 while trying to extricate himself from having to do animal sacrifices today). Note Lev. 17:11: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by the reason of the life that makes atonement." And consider this description of a sin offering which sacrifices a goat (Lev. 17:24-26):

And he shall lay his hand on the head of the male goat, and slay it in the place where they slay the burnt offering before the Lord; it is a sin offering. Then the priest is to take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering; and the rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering. . . . Thus the priest shall make atonement for him in regard to his sin, and he shall be forgiven.

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<sup>83</sup>Gunter Wagner, Pauline Baptism and the Pagan Mysteries (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1967), p. 265; as cited in Nash, Gospel and the Greeks, pp. 140-41. The disputed passage is quoted at considerable length in Latin (alas!) by James G. Frazer, The Golden Bough (New York: Gramercy Books, 1981), vol. 1, p. 298, fn. 1. Note that throughout my essay, I cite from the original two volume edition of 1891, which this publisher reprinted in one volume.

<sup>84</sup>Frazer, The Golden Bough, 1:296-97; Nash, Gospel and the Greeks, pp. 138-43.



Given the origination of Christianity in Judea and its Jewish roots, it's far more sensible to look to the book of Leviticus for the origin of the Christian belief that Jesus was the Lamb offered for the sins of the world (John 1:29; Rev. 5:6, 8-9, 12) than appealing to any pagan mystery religion's practices.<sup>85</sup>

To label the taurobolium a "blood baptism" ignores how this ceremony was not an initiation rite for new believers. It was something that could be done repeatedly by the same individuals, unlike the case for baptism in Christianity, which should be performed only once in a believer's life. Baptism uses water, not blood, and it immerses believers, and does not splatter blood on them. Furthermore, the doctrine of water baptism originated in Judaism as a initiation rite for gentile converts, although this ceremony is commanded nowhere in the OT. The Pharisees in particular believed a gentile believer had to be both baptized and circumcised. The Essene community, famous for the Dead Sea Scrolls it inadvertently preserved by placing them in caves, also baptized believers. The rabbinic schools of Hillel and Shammai, who both lived in the first century A.D., conducted a running debate over whether baptism or circumcision was more important when converting gentile proselytes. Then, according to scholar Herman Ridderbos, the meaning of the ceremony to Christians as explained by Paul, that a believer is symbolically reenacting the death and resurrection of Jesus, as well as burying the old sinful way of life and becoming a new man obedient to God (Rom. 6:2-12), is not found in any pagan mystery religion's initiation rites. Wagner maintains that no idea of death or resurrection was associated with the taurobolium: "It is important that the taurobolium-initiation is not to be regarded as a dying and rising again, an after-fulfillment of the destiny of Attis." According to Robert Duthroy, the taurobolium's meaning went through three major stages of development, though other scholars would deny this interpretation and say it underwent no changes in meaning for its pagan practitioners. Only in the third stage, post-300 A.D., did the notion of the bull's sacrifice change from being a sacrifice to being "merely the only means to obtain the purifying blood." But, by that time, Christianity was such a strong competitor to the heathen cults that they easily could have been lifting ideas ("blood as a purifier") out of Christianity, instead of vice versa. Clearly, especially when the taurobolium has to be anachronistically projected back from the second century to the first in order to be an influence on the NT, it is much more sensible to see Jewish, not pagan, animal sacrifices as the origin of the Christian doctrine of blood as a purifying sin remover.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Conder maintains that the mystery religions still had a hold among the Samaritans in the first century A.D. in Judea (MB, p. 131-32). He says it was the main source of Christian doctrine, not Judaism. But this claim faces a major problem: Was this true? Norman Anderson maintains that: "There is no evidence whatever, that I know of, that the mystery religions had any influence in Palestine in the early decades of the first century" (Christianity and World Religions (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), pp. 53 and/or 54; cited by McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, p. 185). Conder should provide specific evidence that proves the first-century Samaritans were idolaters, etc. before this claim should be accepted.

<sup>86</sup>Herman Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of His Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 24; Wagner, Pauline Baptism, p. 266; Robert Duthroy, The Taurobolium: Its Evolution and Terminology (Leiden: Brill, 1969); pp. 120-21; all as cited in Nash, Gospel and the Greeks, pp. 141-43, 150-51, 156-58; McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 182-84;

## SURFACE SIMILARITIES DO NOT PROVE DEPENDENCE

German scholar Adolf von Harnack made an excellent summary statement against the idea that Christianity was influenced by pagan mystery religions. It points to the problem with tracing everything back to a common source (Babylon) as Hislop does, ignoring how men independently of one another can come up with the same ideas based on their experience of nature and the seasons.

We must reject the comparative mythology which finds a causal connection between everything and everything else, which tears down solid barriers, bridges chasms as though it were child's play, and spins combinations from superficial similarities. . . . By such methods one can turn Christ into a sun god in the twinkling of an eye, or one can bring up the legends attending the birth of every conceivable god, or one can catch all sorts of mythological doves to keep company with the baptismal dove [see MB, pp. 8-9!]; and find any number of celebrated asses to follow the ass on which Jesus rode into Jerusalem; and thus, with the magic wand of 'comparative religion,' triumphantly eliminate every spontaneous trait in any religion.<sup>87</sup>

In short, similarities do not prove causal influence; although religions that are true and false can have similar ideas, that doesn't prove the true one got its ideas from the false. Especially when the specifics of the pagan myths are compared to the NT's doctrines, the "similarities" stand revealed as superficial. Also, an analysis such as Conder's ignores human creativity, in separately inventing similar mythical explanations for the same phenomena of nature, such as the cyclical view of time and the death/rebirth motif coming from the seasonal changes affecting vegetation.

## SOME STANDARD DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MOST MYSTERY RELIGIONS AND CHRISTIANITY

Before moving on, let's list some basic differences between the mystery religions and Christianity. The mystery religions as well as Gnosticism attempted to have special secret, special knowledge known only to a few initiates to the "truth." In contrast, Christianity sought to publicly proclaim "Christ, and Him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2) and His message to the world to everyone, whether they believed or not. Christianity maintained there was only one way to salvation, and so believed in exclusivity. There is only one true religion to a Christian, as Jesus made plain (John 14:6): "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me." Similarly, Peter declared to the Jewish leadership that everyone had to accept Jesus to be saved (Acts 4:12): "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved." For this reason, Paul and Barnabas made a point of denying they were Zeus and Hermes to a large crowd in Lystra who thought they were.

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Wilf Hey and John Meakin, "Acts 15 The Jerusalem Conference," pp. 2, 11; Moishe Rosen, Y'Shua: The Jewish Way to Say Jesus (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), pp. 79-80.

<sup>87</sup>Adolf von Harnack, Wissenschaft und Leben (Giessen, 1913), as cited by Nash, The Gospel and the Greeks, pp. 118-19.

They, along with the high priest of Zeus, wished to make sacrifices to them. But instead, Barnabas and Paul didn't seek to make a maximal number of converts by bending doctrine to fit their pre-existing beliefs, but tore their robes and proclaimed (Acts 14:15): "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you in order that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them."<sup>88</sup> But believers in pagan religions did not care how many gods they or others worshiped besides the one they may have emphasized. For if Christianity was as paganized as Conder maintains, there would not been such (as the world would see it) fanatical Christian resistance to sacrificing and/or swearing allegiance to the Roman emperors as gods. Most of these religions had notions of "resurrections" that were tied to a cyclical view of nature and of history, of the birth, death, and rebirth of vegetation from spring to winter and back again. By contrast, Christianity emphatically believed in a linear view of time and history, because God created the world at a specific time in the past, and because Jesus died "once for all." Only Mithraism had a linear view of time--but then its god didn't die and then come to life by a resurrection, so this similarity proves little here. Christianity also had a much stronger ethical, moral, and intellectual aspect than most mystery religions (with the partial exception of Mithraism), especially early on, which emphasized emotion and ritual, not moral transformation. Who can deny the demanding and majestic sweep of Christian ethics as proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount, the Letter of James, the "Love Chapter" of I Cor. 13? The idea of salvation in paganism did not involve a moral change or moral duties or deliverance from sin, while Christianity required all three. Furthermore, Christianity's Savior was an actual person in history, in the time-space continuum. The pagan "savior-gods" were "nebulous figures of an imaginary past." Often myths begin with uncertain terminology such as "It is said," or "They say," which is never found in the NT. The Greek gods, who supposedly visited men on earth, "are not described realistically, but rather as a character of fantasy would be." As Anderson commented: "There is all the difference in the world between the rising or rebirth of a deity which symbolizes the coming of spring (and the reawakening of nature) and the resurrection 'on the third day' of a historical person." For reasons such as these, as against the charge Paul created a mystery religion on a Jewish base, that the historian of philosophy Gordon Clark replied: "Such surmises are not so much bad scholarship as prejudiced irresponsibility."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 188-89. Their analysis of this text is positively deadly to Conder's concoction of a biography of the life of Simon the Sorcerer, which is almost pure, unproven, unprovable fantasy (MB, pp. 131-39). Maximizing converts at the expense of doctrine was not a first-century church tendency.

<sup>89</sup>For this general line of reasoning, see McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 186-87; Nash, Gospel and the Greeks, pp. 171-72. For more on the theme of Judeo-Christianity's linear view of time and how this helped cause the rise of modern science, see Stanley Jaki, The Savior of Science (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1988); Science and Creation: From Eternal Cycles to an Oscillating Universe (New York: Science History Publications, 1974); The Origin of Science and the Science of Its Origin (South Bend, IN: Regnery/Gateway, 1978). My essay "Christianity: A Cause of Modern Science?: The Duhem-Jaki and Merton Theses Explained" also deals with this truly crucial subject more briefly; Gordon Clark, Thales to Dewey, p. 194, cited in Nash, Gospel and the Greeks, pp. 121-125, 128, 146; Norman

## THE FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN MIRACLE ACCOUNTS

Conder charges that various pagan gods have performed miracles similar Jesus' (MB, pp. 42-43, 144). Does this prove the NT got them from these sources? First, in reply, when it comes to performing miracles, there aren't a huge variety of different things that can be done that would still be understandable and useful to humans, especially in a world without modern technology. Certain basic needs, such as food, good health, long life, etc. are constants of mankind's nature. So then these are the logical place for stories about miracles to occur in any religion. Indeed, before such problems as ill-health, blindness, lameness, deafness, death, the human race remains still totally or partially helpless before them, causing people to seek God's help to meet these needs even today. To say all pagan practices had the same ultimate source ignores how, with humans having the same needs, such as being able to see, hear, walk, etc., similar stories involving the gods satisfying those needs are going to spontaneously and independently pop up. The real issue then is why should anyone consider the Gospels' accounts of miracles as more reliable than those performed by pagan gods. As has been shown above, the NT is a historically reliable book in what can be checked--which means making an inference to what can't be checked directly (Jesus' miracles as having actually happened) is not an operation in blind faith. Claiming the Gospels are myths, an issue also dealt with above, simply isn't plausible, since as a literary genre, myths have a very different feel from the Gospels. As J.B. Phillips comments:

I have read, in Greek and Latin, scores of myths, but I did not find the slightest flavour of myth here [in the Gospels]. There is no hysteria, no careful working for effect, and no attempt at collusion. . . . One sensed again that understatement which we have been taught to think is more "British" than Oriental. There is an almost childlike candour and simplicity, and the total effect is tremendous.

Then we should carefully consider what C.S. Lewis had to say, a man with a truly professional knowledge of mythology, about the differences between miracles attributed to pagans and to Christians:

If we open such books as Grimm's Fairy Tales or Ovid's Metamorphoses or the Italian epics we find ourselves in a world of miracles so diverse that they can hardly be classified. Beasts turn into men and men into beasts or trees, trees talk, ships become goddesses, and a magic ring can cause tables richly spread with food to appear in solitary places. . . . the least suspicion that it was true would turn the fun into nightmare. If such things really happened they would, I suppose, show that Nature was

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Anderson, Christianity and World Religions (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), p. 53; as cited in McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 176-82. Yair Davidy, in his Tribes, maintains that Zoroastrianism arose in the place(s) where the twelve tribes were taken to, and was ultimately derived from Judaism, even as it was changed by the apostate Israelites, etc. In turn, it's known that Mithraism came out of Zoroastrianism, so these similarities between Christianity and Mithraism could be traceable to how Mithraism is like Judaism!

being invaded [by an alien power]. . . . The fitness of the Christian miracles, and their difference from these mythological miracles, lies in the fact that they show invasion by a Power which is not alien. They are what might be expected to happen when she is invaded not simply by a god, but by the God of Nature: by a Power which is outside her jurisdiction not as a foreigner but as a sovereign. . . . the Christian miracles have a much greater probability in virtue of their organic connection with one another and with the whole structure of the religion they exhibit. . . . [Even if the pagan Roman Emperor Vespasian actually performed two miraculous healings] it would remain a quite isolated and anomalous fact. Nothing comes of it, nothing leads up to it, it establishes no body of doctrine, explains nothing, is connected with nothing. And this, after all, is an unusually favourable instance of a non-Christian miracle [since various pagan historians said he did them]. The immoral, and sometimes almost idiotic interferences attributed to gods in Pagan stories, even if they had a trace of historical evidence, could be accepted only on the condition of our accepting a wholly meaningless universe. What raises infinite difficulties and solves none will be believed by a rational man only under absolute compulsion.<sup>90</sup>

Fundamentally, Conder relies on people's lack of familiarity with the Greek and Roman myths through their own reading (a casualty of tossing out the old classical curriculum!) in order to make his case plausible. Since the stories of pagan miracles come in books that cannot be called historical or primarily factual, unlike the Gospels or Acts, and the miracles similar to those in Christianity presumably occur in pagan sources detailing inherently implausible miracles, or even truly absurd or idiotic ones as well, the differences between the two's miracle accounts should become obvious.

#### THE UNRELIABLE NATURE OF THE MIRACLES ATTRIBUTED TO BUDDHA

How reliable are the accounts of miracles attributed to Buddha? Conder cites a story about Buddha while he was fasting being tempted by "the Prince of Evil, Mara," and compares it to Christ's temptation by Satan in the wilderness (MB, p. 41). There are two major problems in using this story to assert Christianity adapted it for use in the Gospels. First, India is far enough from the Roman Empire it couldn't have directly influenced its people hardly. Buddhism spread towards the east, not the west, towards China and Indochina, even as it died out in the land of its birth, India. Second, the accounts written about the life of Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) (c. 563-483 b.c.) are very unreliable, especially when they say he did miracles. As H.G. Wells commented:

It is only within the last century that the increasing study of the Pali language, in which most of the original sources were written, has given the world a real knowledge of the life and actual thought of Gautama. Previously his story was overlaid by monstrous accumulations of legend, and his teaching violently

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<sup>90</sup>J.B. Phillips, The Ring of Truth (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1967), p. 77; as quoted in McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, p. 195; C.S. Lewis, Miracles: A Preliminary Study (New York: Collier Books, Macmillan Publishing Co., 1960), pp. 132-33.

misconceived. But now we have a very human and understandable account of him. . . . Men who would scorn to tell a lie in everyday life will become unscrupulous cheats and liars when they have given themselves up to propagandist work . . . [Buddha's followers] were presently telling their hearers of the miracles that attended the Buddha's birth . . . of his youthful feats of strength, of the marvels of his everyday life, winding up with a sort of illumination of his body at the moment of death. Of course it was impossible to believe that Buddha was the son of a mortal father. He was miraculously conceived through his mother dreaming of a beautiful white elephant! Previously he had himself been a marvelous elephant possessing six tusks; he had generously given them all to a needy hunter--and even helped to saw them off.

Now, let's illustrate how defective Conder's scholarship can be. Citing this story about Buddha shows how an uncritical use of biased secondary works about pagan religions is fundamental to Mystery Babylon. He leans upon Doane, whose work (Bible Myths and Their Parallels in Other Religions) was first published in 1882, which in turn depends on Conway's Siamese Life of Buddha. But Thailand is not where Pali is spoken as the common people's everyday language, nor where Gautama hailed from, which means this story almost certainly isn't true. There's every good reason to see this as one of the stories his followers made up--like the tale that "meteors fell and clouds of darkness covered the earth" when Buddha died (MB, p. 64). These miracle stories were evidently written a long time after Buddha lived. They also, on a deep level, contradict his teachings unlike the Christian miracles, as C.S. Lewis noted:

But what could be more absurd than that he who came to teach us that Nature is an illusion from which we must escape should occupy himself in producing effects on the Natural level--that he who comes to wake us from a nightmare should add to the nightmare? The more we respect his teaching the less we could accept his miracles.<sup>91</sup>

By contrast the New Testament's stories about the miraculous are much more restrained, much more understated, less fanciful, more practical. These differences make them far more believable than those ascribed to Buddha that Wells described. Then the NT's accounts of miracles were written within one, at the most two, generations after Jesus died, which brings appeals to eyewitness testimony into play. And even hostile Jewish sources (the Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a) as well as the pagan Celsus (who obviously used Jewish sources) make oblique mention of Jesus' ability to do the miraculous, but attribute it to Satan, magical arts, sorcery, etc. (cf. Matt. 9:34; 12:24; Mark 3:22; see also Josephus, who attributes to Jesus "surprising feats"). Trying to tar Christianity's origins with some dubious story about Buddha shows how defective Conder's scholarship can be.

#### IS THE CHRISTIAN PASSOVER PAGAN?

Conder attacks the Christian Passover (communion, the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, etc.) as derived from paganism: "But the celebration of a sacred banquet is equally as pagan [as Easter and Christmas], and, I say now that if

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<sup>91</sup>H.G. Wells, Outline of History, vol. 1, pp. 311, 319; Lewis, Miracles, p. 133.

it were not found commanded in the NT few of you would have any problem in abandoning it completely as an abomination before your Creator!" (MB, p. 48).

He has a fastidious, esthetic distaste, which he attempts to pass on to his readers (cf. MB, p. 111), against the idea of eating the body and drinking the blood of a Man, of Jesus. In reply, consider an insightful observation of C.S. Lewis's: The true religion has to have both "thick" and "clear" elements, or ideas and rituals that appeal to both the emotional and rational side of man, since he is composed of both. By this reasoning, since Christianity has both, this suggests it is the true religion. As he explains:

By Thick I mean those which have orgies and ecstasies and mysteries and local attachments: Africa is full of Thick religions. By Clear I mean those which are philosophical, ethical, and universalizing: Stoicism, Buddhism, and the Ethical Church are Clear religions. Now if there is a true religion it must be both Thick and Clear: for the true God must have made both the child and the man, both the savage and the citizen, both the head and the belly. . . . Christianity really breaks down the middle wall of the partition. It takes a convert from central Africa and tells him to obey an enlightened universalist ethic: it takes a twentieth-century academic prig like me and tells me to go fasting to a Mystery, to drink the blood of the Lord. The savage convert has to be Clear: I have to be Thick. That is how one knows one has come to the real religion.

Arguing that no OT text mentions taking in the body and blood of the Messiah symbolically is irrelevant (MB, p. 47), since God does not reveal all His plan in any one place. Even within the OT there is progressive revelation, from the Torah, to Samuel and Kings, to the Prophets, in which God gradually reveals greater knowledge to humanity. The NT, when it adds the Christian Passover ceremony, merely is a further revelation. It must be accepted as part of the overall "package," once you have proven the NT to be supernatural in origin (such as by Jesus' accurate prediction that Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed) and historically reliable. Complaining that this ceremony is cannibalism--albeit in symbolic form--is human reasoning that cuts no ice if God commands it.<sup>92</sup> Metzger notes little evidence exists about the sacramental meals of the pagans, or whether they were different in meaning from Christian communion:

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<sup>92</sup>Lewis, God in the Dock, pp. 102-3; Conder (MB, p. 46) mistakenly follows Hislop when saying "cannibal" comes from the Chaldean word "cahna," "the priest," and Baal, meaning "the priests of Baal." In fact, according to The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, it comes from a Spanish corruption of an Indian word: [1545-55; <Sp canibal, var. of caribal, equiv. to canib-, carib- (<Arawak) + -al -AL<sup>1</sup>; from the belief that the Caribs of the West Indies ate human flesh] Normally, I'd just call this a trivial slip-up. But it is symptomatic of Conder's scholarship to rely on Hislop (1877) rather than an up-to-date dictionary for a word's etymology. Likewise, the contemporary scholarly community in classics and biblical studies has mostly tossed out tales of Christianity being derived from mystery religions by and large decades ago. Conder bypasses this by using sources either that are older than the current scholarly consensus (i.e., Doane, 1882) or people driven by such a deep unbelieving bias that they engage in careless comparisons and analogy (Walker).

Similarly with respect to sacramental meals reserved for those who had been initiated into the community of devotees, there is singularly little evidence. Nothing is heard of sacramental meals in Orphism [a later development of the worship of Dionysus]. The drinking of the kykeon in the rites of Eleusis, which has sometimes been thought to be the prototype of Paul's teaching and practice regarding the Lord's Supper, is as different as possible from the Christian Communion.<sup>93</sup>

As Nash observed (cited above), since little is known about the pagans' ceremonial meals, drawing close comparisons with the Christian Passover degenerates into superficial analysis. Conder once uses a statement by Frazer that discussed the purpose of a fast by the devotees of Attis (similar to that done by followers of Tammuz). It showed respect to the god by not eating bread "may possibly have been a preparation for a sacramental meal . . ." (MB, p. 66). Are you going to risk your eternal life on the words "may possibly have been"? Furthermore, a fast is the opposite of a meal! To knowledgeably draw any comparisons, it's necessary to know specifically what symbolic meanings the pagans applied to the different foods served at their meals and so forth.

WERE MITHRAISM OR DIONYSTIC RITUALS THE SOURCE OF THE CHRISTIAN PASSOVER?

Of all the mystery religions, only Mithraism had anything similar to the Lord's Supper (which serves as a serious challenge to Conder's claim the followers of Osiris had a similar meal--MB, p. 45), which even then served water, not wine, to its initiates. But since Mithraism had little hold on the Roman Empire in the first century, a point dealt with above, its rituals simply could not have influenced primitive Christianity's. Consider another basic difference of Christian ceremonies (baptism, the Passover service, etc.) from pagan rituals: The Christian ones were considered ineffective without faith or a morally or spiritually transformed life, while the pagan ones gave their followers immortality in an external, mechanical way, depending "solely on the performance of the rite, independent of the faith, attitude, or intentions of the worshiper."<sup>94</sup> Hence, since little is known of the specific meanings of the symbols of any pagan ritual meals, including that of Mithraism, drawing any tight analogies to Christian practice goes far beyond the available evidence.

So then, did the Christian Passover originate in the cult of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and vegetation? It couldn't have come from the savage rites the devotees of Dionysus participated in because these died out long before Christianity arose. The most ancient rite involved this god's mostly female followers working themselves up into a frenzy, after much orgiastic revelry. They would attack a living bull, or perhaps a goat or fawn, dismember it, and eat its raw flesh and drink its blood. The Orphic mystery religion, common in Greece by the mid-sixth century b.c., was a later development of the worship of Dionysus. It toned down these proceedings, and eliminated the orgies and wild partying, while adding a sacred literature

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<sup>93</sup>Bruce M. Metzger, "Methodology in the Study of the Mystery Religions and Early Christianity," in Historical and Literary Studies (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 14, as cited by Nash, Gospel and the Greeks, p. 151.

<sup>94</sup>Nash, Gospel and the Greeks, pp. 152-53, 158-59.



composed of hymns and prayers to interpret the rites. The Orphics still retained the practice of attacking, ripping apart, and eating a living bull. Could have such an undignified, wild frenzy of a ritual been the source of the Christian Passover? The foods eaten and symbols attached to the foods involved were certainly different between the two. To the Orphics, by eating the god, they made themselves like the god, taking on his characteristics, a theme Frazer develops at enormous length.<sup>95</sup> To the Christian, the primary meaning of taking the wine and bread at Passover is to symbolize accepting Jesus' sacrifice as a condition for eternal life (John 6:54): "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." It's far more sensible to see the origin of the Christian Passover ceremony in the Jewish Passover itself, the day of its institution as the Gospels themselves say, instead of straying into scarcely known pagan rites.

DID THE PAGANS HAVE SAVIOR-GODS WHO DIED AS JESUS DID?

Conder claims that Caiaphas's words about one man dying for the nation (John 18:14) make little sense in a [Jewish?] Christian framework, but do in a pagan setting: "The crucified deity in the flesh simply harkens back to Nimrod, who, when he was crucified, died for the sins of the people." He then uses Frazer's description of the ancient pagans sacrificing some man as a representative of the king as a "replacement savior-Sun-god's sacrifice for the good of the people" (MB, p. 61). Here Conder draws a completely illegitimate parallel. While there were "savior gods" in pagan religions, upon closer examination it's discovered that only in Christianity was the death of God for other people's sins, that it was once for all time, and that it was an actual event in history, not a myth. Upon inspecting the specific meanings and details of the myths in question, the similarities to Christianity are clearly only superficial. It's unacceptable for Conder to use Frazer to support this claim when carefully examining the latter's overall thesis, instead of just biting off some chunk that might suit his own purposes. For example, Frazer at one point writes: "No one, therefore, could so appropriately die for the king and, through him, for the whole people, as the king's son." He then cites Philo's description that an ancient custom was for a king to sacrifice "his beloved son to die for the whole people, as a ransom offered to the avenging demons" in a time of great crisis. Is Conder right after all? But when you go back and examine the overall point of this section of Conder's work, it's found that the specific meaning behind the sacrifice is very different from Christianity's. Why did ancient pagan kings offer up a substitute for themselves to die?<sup>96</sup> Frazer explains that since

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<sup>95</sup>Nash, Gospel and the Greeks, pp. 134-36, 151-52; Frazer, Golden Bough, vol. 1, pp. 213-409; vol. 2, pp. 1-222.

<sup>96</sup>Here we should consider Conder's reference to Walker (MB, p. 111), which refers to the Babylonian king's substitutes during the Sacaea festival dying "as a representative of the king, in memory of the Sun-god of Babylon who was crucified for the sins of humanity!" Frazer, Golden Bough, vol. 1, p. 226 deals with this same festival. An examination of the long footnote reveals all sorts of language reflecting problems in drawing the certain conclusions Conder would want, such as "probably" (three times), including about this ceremony being "much older" than the Median takeover of Babylon (sixth century b.c.) Curiously, when Frazer denies that a certain Greek word means "hung" instead of "crucified," he says hanging wasn't used as a form of execution in the ancient world. This, granted a standard translation, presumably would have been news to Mordecai and Haman in the book of Esther's description of

many pagans believed that various pagan gods died, pagans believed that their god-kings would die as well since they were fleshly beings. This threat called for decisive proactive measures!:

Now primitive peoples, as we have seen, sometimes believe that their safety and even that of the world is bound up with the life of one of these god-men or human incarnations of the divinity. . . . The danger is a formidable one; for if the course of nature is dependent on the man-god's life [notice!--this has nothing to do with spiritual salvation from sin!--EVS], what catastrophes may not be expected from the gradual enfeeblement of his powers and their final extinction in death? There is only one way of averting these dangers. The man-god must be killed as soon as he shows symptoms that his powers are beginning to fail, and his soul must be transferred to a vigorous successor before it has been seriously impaired by the threatened decay.

As an example of this belief, Frazer mentions people in the Congo (central Africa!) who believed that if "their pontiff the Chitome" were allowed "to die a natural death, the world would perish, and the earth, which he alone sustained by his power and merit, would immediately be annihilated." This hardly has the same meaning as John 3:16! Material prosperity and this life are what matters to the pagans when they believe this. Again, you're back to Frazer's theme of the cyclical/seasonal vegetation cycle when he writes this later in the same section dealing with god-kings and/or their substitutes dying: "But the task of making the crops grow, thus deputed to the temporary kings [who were killed as substitutes for the real kings--EVS], is one of the supernatural functions regularly supposed to be discharged by kings in primitive society." So while Frazer may use sometimes loose language that implies a parallel between Christian and pagan beliefs that Conder could seize upon to his seeming benefit, a more careful reading reveals the deep differences between the two.<sup>97</sup>

#### HOW THE DEATH OF DIONYSUS WAS DIFFERENT FROM JESUS'

As for the tales about Dionysus himself, Frazer uses loaded language and different descriptions of this god's fate. He writes: "Like the other gods of vegetation whom we have been considering, Dionysus was believed to have died a violent death, but to have been brought to life again; and his sufferings, death, and resurrection were enacted in his sacred rites." This sounds similar to Christianity, right? But the devil is in the details. Why did Dionysus die? To save humanity from spiritual sin? No--he died because Juno (Hera), the wife of Jupiter (Zeus), was jealous of the child. Presumably, he was his "love child." She bribed the child's guards that Jupiter left to protect him, and then had the Titans attack and kill him. They dismembered his body, boiled it, and ate it. However, Minerva, who shared in this dirty deed, had still saved Dionysus' heart, and presented it

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the court of (most likely) Xerxes, the Persian king best known for invading Greece and losing the naval battle of Salamis in 480 b.c. to Athens and other Greek city-states. Certainly, the word "kremannumi" can refer to hanging, not crucifixion. See the Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek-English lexicon, p. 450.

<sup>97</sup>Frazer, Golden Bough, vol. 1, pp. 214-15, 217-18, 228, 233, 235 and in passim; McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 186-87.

to Jupiter. In retaliation, Jupiter then punished the Titans by putting them to death. So now--be serious folks--how similar is this to the death of Jesus?!? The meaning and causes of death are totally different in Dionysus's case. Then, whether he rose from the dead involves which version of the myth you'll accept. In one version, Apollo pieced together Dionysus's limbs at Zeus's commands, and then buried them on Parnassus. That doesn't make for much of a "resurrection"! In another version, after being pieced together, he became young again. In one account, his heart was pounded up and placed in a potion given to Semele, who then conceived him. Of course, in one rendition he, after being buried, rose from the dead and went to heaven, and then, according to Frazer, when the resurrection was part of the myth in some area, it was reenacted at the rites of Dionysus's followers. But, now, what century was this last version propagated? Which one was the most original? The French scholar Andrew Boulanger maintains that: "The conception that the god dies and is resurrected in order to lead his faithful to eternal life is represented in NO Hellenistic mystery religion." This means you couldn't take the claim Dionysus (nor Adonis nor Attis nor Osiris) rose from the dead in any kind of literal fashion. And, as shown above, Frazer misapplied the Christian/Jewish term "resurrection" to Attis using a rather problematic single late source (fourth century, Firmicus Maternus), and this may be happening again here. Hence, further research would be necessary in the original texts of the myths themselves in order to judge which version of the myth about Dionysus's fate was the most common in the ancient world before someone could confidently and triumphantly proclaim him a "dying savior-god." Quite obviously, Frazer confuses the doctrines of the immortal soul and the resurrection, when he writes that at the rites of Dionysus that

it even appears that a general doctrine of resurrection, or at least of immortality, was inculcated on the worshippers; for Plutarch [the ancient Greek biographer and writer (c. 46 A.D. to after 119 A.D.) who wrote in Latin and is a key source for the myths], writing to console his wife on the death of their infant daughter, comforts her with the thought of the immortality of the soul as taught by tradition and revealed in the mysteries of Dionysus.

If it turns out Frazer has merely footnoted as proof of Dionysus's "resurrection" sources that merely said he didn't die since he had an immortal soul, this cult is hardly a likely source for the Christian belief in Jesus' personal, literal resurrection from the dead.<sup>98</sup>

#### HOW PROMETHEUS'S SUFFERINGS WERE DIFFERENT FROM JESUS' DEATH

In order to say the suffering of the Greek god Prometheus was similar to Jesus', Conder quotes Doane, who in turn quotes from the ancient Greek playwright Aeschylus's (525-426 b.c.) play Prometheus Chained (MB, pp. 51, 62, 73). Although Conder has the correct title in his footnotes, for some reason Doane entitles this play The Divine Sufferer. This name change appears to be

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<sup>98</sup>my emphasis, Andre Boulanger, Orphee: Rapports de l'orphisme et du christianisme (Paris, 1925), p. 102; as cited by Ronald Nash, Christianity and the Hellenistic World (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), pp. 172 and/or 173 in McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 184-85; Frazer, Golden Bough, vol. 1, pp. 322-324. Clearly, further research in Frazer's references is necessary to settle this issue one way or the other.

deceitfully calculated to make the Christian parallels sharper. Doane misquotes (by using "their" for "our," and "they" for "us") from Isaiah 53:5, 7 to imply the suffering of Jesus was just like that of Prometheus. Even a rather casual skim through this play demonstrates how much Doane (and, therefore, Conder) have seized upon a superficial similarity to tar Christianity by claiming the latter depended directly or indirectly on the former. First, quite clearly Prometheus was not crucified, but simply chained to a certain mountain in the Caucasus. At the beginning of the play, the god Vulcan reluctantly chained down Prometheus. Jupiter (Zeus) was punishing him for having helped humanity race by giving it the gift of fire and learning in the arts and sciences. Vulcan complains that he has to tie down Prometheus "with indissoluble chains, perforce, must I now rivet to this savage [?] rock." He comments to the character Strength, "The manacles are ready, thou mayst see them." Strength replies, "Bind them around [not in--EVS] his hands; with all thy force Strike, nail them fast, drive them into the rock." Later, during Vulcan's dialog with Strength, the latter says, "And now clasp this [arm] secure, that he may learn how impotent his craft, opposed to Jove. . . . Across his breast draw now this stubborn bar of adamant, fix firm its sharpened point. . . . with all thy force enring [not into--EVS] his legs." Prometheus later wails by himself: "Behold, what tortures for revolving ages I here must struggle; such unseemly chains." Clearly, this is not a crucifixion! Doane's scholastic dishonesty is evident to anyone reading the original text when supposedly based on this source he could write that Prometheus was "hanging with arms extended in the form of a cross . . . which had brought on him that horrible crucifixion." Then, did Prometheus suffer for the same reasons Jesus did? Jesus died in order to save mankind from spiritual sin, and was resurrected to give us eternal immortal spirit life (Romans 5:8-11; 6:23). Prometheus was punished for giving the gift of fire to humanity, and teaching it various arts and sciences, such as astronomy, smelting metal, masonry, sailing, medicine, and interpreting omens from animals' livers: "The ills of man you've heard: I formed his mind, and through the cloud of barb'rous ignorance diffused the beams of knowledge." He summarized why he was being punished thus: "To mortal man I bear this weight of woe; hid in a hollow cane the fount of fire I privately conveyed, of every art productive, and the noblest gift to men. And for this slight offence, woe, woe is me! I bear these chains, fixed to this savage rock . . ." The reasons for Jesus' death were quite different from what caused Prometheus' sufferings! Prometheus underwent an involuntary punishment inflicted by the chief god, while Jesus' sufferings and death were not a punishment, and were voluntary, for He had not sinned against the Father. Furthermore, Prometheus wasn't a "dying savior god"! The essence of his tragedy was that since he was a god, he was immortal, and so he couldn't die! His sufferings won't end until eventually the cycle of fate frees him from his chains, after Jupiter is inevitably unseated as the chief god, just as his father Saturn was before him. Ever defiant, Prometheus replies against the threats Jupiter could increase his sufferings: "What should I fear, by Fate exempt from death?" Earlier, he lamented to the goddess Io: "Ill wouldst thou bear my miseries, by the Fates exempt from death, the refuge of th' afflicted." By contrast, although Jesus was Jehovah, the God of Israel, he became flesh so that He could die, and so He did die. (Need I cite texts to prove this?) The only part of the quote from Doane that actually that comes from the play is where Prometheus explains his actions, saying that by "boldly pleading [he] saved them from destruction, saved them from sinking to the realms of night," etc. The context shows he wasn't saving humanity from spiritual sin, but had persuaded Jupiter from wishing to destroy the human race, and start again. Note this statement that immediately precedes Doane's citation from the play:

"But for unhappy mortals [Jupiter] had no regard, and all the present race [he] willed to extirpate, and form anew." Compare this incident to when Moses pleaded with God to save Israel from destruction for its sins while wandering in the wilderness, and to start anew with him alone after they worshiped the Golden Calf (Ex. 32:10-14). Saving humanity from physical destruction by pleading with Jupiter is very different from saving humanity through becoming human, and dying for its spiritual sins and guilt from breaking God's law, and then by rising from the dead, giving it immortal life. Clearly, when consulting the original work, as done here, Doane's (and, by extension, Conder's) case falls to pieces. This has ominous implications should this be done with other citations found in Mystery Babylon: How many of these could stand scrutiny?<sup>99</sup>

#### SPECIFICALLY HOW JESUS' DEATH DIFFERED FROM THE PAGAN GODS' DEATHS SUMMARIZED

Conder claims that:

Now it is a fact that the legendary suffering savior-gods of the ancient pagan Mysteries were all maltreated. In other words, they suffered unjustly for the sins of the world. They bore the transgressions of humanity in their flesh and by their death humanity was saved. Prominent among these gods was Mithra, whose worshippers literally flooded into the first century Christian Church. (MB, p. 73; cf. p. 110, "Mithraic doctrines of forgiveness of sins.")

Except for the first sentence perhaps, none of these statements are true. When peering underneath the surface similarities between Jesus' death and those of various pagan sun/savior-gods, the similarities vanish, as was done above with the specific cases of Prometheus and Dionysus. Only in Christianity did God in the flesh die for the sins of others, for humans breaking His law, as a vicarious, substitutionary atonement. No pagan religion attributed to their god the belief of Paul as found in Romans 5:17-18: "Much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ . . . even so through one act of righteousness their resulted justification of life to all men." As Wagner observed, none of the pagan gods "has the intention of helping men been attributed. The sort of death that they died is quite different (hunting accident, self-emasulation, etc.)" Then Jesus died once for all time and all men (Hebrews 7:27; 9:25-28; 10:10-14). Christianity denies the cyclical view of time and history, in which all the events of history will be literally repeated time and time again, a theory pagans believed almost universally in some form. (It's found in Aeschylus' play, since Prometheus is confident Zeus is fated to be unseated as the chief god, just as his father before him was). Like Judaism, Christianity upholds the linear view of time as progressing from creation to the second coming and judgment day--the view that was necessary for modern science to come into existence. To a Christian, the idea of His Savior having to die again and again literally is unbearably repugnant, so it can't be an event that is constantly repeated literally time and time again, just as creation and judgment day won't be repeated either. Jesus' death also was an actual event in history. At a specific time and place He "suffered under Pontius Pilate,"

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<sup>99</sup>My emphasis, Robert Potter, The Plays of Aeschylus (London: George Routledge and Son, 1886), pp. 11-14, 24-25, 33-34, 39.

which is hardly the case for the death of the pagan gods of mythology, who died in some dim, undatable time and place. Jesus also died voluntarily, as no pagan god did. He sacrificed himself by intention from the beginning of His ministry. This was unlike how (say) Dionysus was killed out of Juno's jealousy or Osiris was slain due to a plot of his brother and 72 others or Attis mutilated himself under a pine tree or was killed by a boar like Adonis.

As J. Gresham Machen comments: "Osiris, Adonis, and Attis were overtaken by their fate; Jesus gave his life freely away. The difference is stupendous; it involves the very heart of the religion of Paul." As Jesus said, comparing Himself to a good shepherd (John 10:11, 17-18):

I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. . . . For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.

Finally, Jesus' death was not a defeat but an ultimate triumph, because He rose from the dead, which allowed us to be saved (justified) by His death, and saved (sanctified and ultimately born again) by His life (Rom. 5:8-10). A sense of exultation is found in the NT that sharply contrasts with the attitudes of the devotees of the Mysteries, "whose followers wept and mourned for the terrible fate that overtook their gods."<sup>100</sup> When Peter denied Jesus would die, since he believed Jesus was the Conquering Messiah who would soon set up His kingdom, Jesus "turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's'" (Matt. 16:23). Some basic probing exposes how superficial are the similarities of the pagan "savior-gods" to Christianity, for their gods died for very different reasons compared to Jesus' death, which proves how shallow are the claims that Christianity borrowed its doctrines from pagan religions.

#### FRAZER'S THESIS TIES THE VEGETATION CYCLE TO THE PAGAN GODS' DEATHS AND "RESURRECTIONS"

Once you realize what Frazer's overarching thesis is, Conder's use of The Golden Bough is seriously undercut. Frazer ties together various pagan rites to the seasonal vegetation cycle, which causes the pagan gods' deaths and "resurrections" to the reenacted yearly. In a peasant agricultural society in which almost everybody's livelihood is directly dependent on how good or bad the weather is and its effects on the crops, an overpowering yearning develops to please the gods in order to guarantee a good harvest. So when Frazer speaks of a god's "resurrection" (see MB, p. 66), the question becomes what did he really mean by this term. If he means merely the god was reborn because spring had begun with the passage of the vernal equinox (when the days and nights are equal in length in the spring, which is when spring officially begins), because green things were growing anew, this is hardly a personal resurrection to immortality! Frazer undeniably uses Judeo-Christian terms carelessly. It seems he uses them to force an analogy. He ties Attis's

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<sup>100</sup>J. Gresham Machen, The Origin of Paul's Religion (New York: Macmillan, 1925), p. 315; as cited by Nash, who develops this theme generally, Gospel and the Greeks, pp. 171-72; see also McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 186-87.

"resurrection" very closely to the vegetation cycle, which implies it wasn't "once for all," but had to be repeated annually:

The fastening of his effigy to the tree would then be a representation of his coming to life again in tree-form, just as the placing of the shirt of the effigy of Death upon a tree represents the revival of the spirit of vegetation in a new form. After being attached to the tree, the effigy was kept for a year and then burned. . . . The original intention of thus preserving the effigy for a year and then replacing it by a new one was doubtless to maintain the spirit of vegetation in fresh and vigorous life. . . . As a god of vegetation, annually slain, the representative of Attis would be parallel to the Wild Man, the King, etc. of north European folk-custom.

Frazer's analysis of the Greek myth of Demeter and Proserpine supplies an excellent example of his loose language. Proserpine "who personifies the vegetation, more especially the corn [grain], which dies in summer to revive in spring," was the daughter of Demeter. Proserpine was grabbed by Pluto, the god of the dead and underworld, to be his bride. Due to Demeter's sadness over her loss, she stopped the world's seeds from growing. This threatened humanity with starvation until Zeus intervened. A deal was worked out, in which Proserpine had to spend half (or a third) of the year with Pluto in his underworld kingdom, and the rest with her mother and the gods in the upper world. Now notice Frazer's careless use of the word "resurrection": "Her annual death and resurrection that is, her annual descent into the under world and her ascension from it, appear to have been represented in her rites." Is an annual movement between hades and Mount Olympus a "resurrection"? Hardly! Proserpine didn't actually die, and the movement between the two places was constantly repeated annually, not a "once for all" event. Nor did this "resurrection" give her believers personal immortality, but just ensured the crops would grow. Or consider this extract of Frazer, which shows how the death and "resurrection" (a very dubious term here) of these gods was evidently conceived as an annual event by the heathens:

A leading incident in the Greek myth is the death and resurrection of Proserpine; it is this incident which, coupled with the nature of the goddess as a deity of vegetation, links the myth with the cults of Adonis, Attis, Osiris, and Dionysus; and it is in virtue of this incident that the myth is considered in this chapter. It remains, therefore, to see whether the conception of the annual death and resurrection of a god, which figures so prominently in these great Greek and Oriental [Middle Eastern] worships, has not also its origin in the rustic rites observed by reapers and vine-dressers amongst the corn-shocks and the vines.

Similarly, Frazer says, when discussing Osiris:

There seem to be some grounds for believing that Osiris, the great god of ancient Egypt, was one of those personifications of vegetation, whose annual death and resurrection have been celebrated in so many lands.

If the death and "resurrection" of these gods occurred seasonally, with the winter signifying death and spring rebirth as the plants grew and died, then this cycle has very little to do with the reasons why Jesus died according to

the NT. The specific meanings given by the pagans to the events in the Greek myth of Demeter and Proserpine makes for a great difference between what their rites meant to them, and Jesus' resurrection, and its meaning to Christians. It's necessary to be wary of those who use Christian terminology to describe some pagan rite or myth's events, and then turn around, and say, "Wow! Look at all the similarities to Christianity!" The mere use of Christian terminology can easily prejudice someone's conclusions towards seeing Christian dependence on pagan rites and beliefs when there isn't any.<sup>101</sup>

#### DID THE DYING SAVIOR/SUN-GODS REALLY RISE FROM THE DEAD?

I hereby challenge Conder to prove specifically, by citing examples while quoting the original versions of the myths themselves, such as from Plutarch, Ovid, or whomever, not secondary works such as Doane, Walker, or Frazer, that "Every one of the Sun-god saviors rose from the dead on the first day of the week after three days in the tomb. (MB, p. 65; cf. p. 67). As was shown above, his claim that Attis rose from the dead is based upon one rather dubious, ambiguous late source that Frazer cites. Conder quotes Frazer, who says that Adonis rose from the dead "and ascended up to heaven in the presence of his worshippers" (MB, p. 69). When I consult my edition of Frazer, he indeed does interpret the myth this way, though you would have to know Greek and Latin to really follow his footnotes. After opening this section on Adonis by stating part of his overarching theme, he repeats part of it again later. He compares the seasonal vegetation cycle to Adonis's death and resurrection after citing a similar legend about the Babylonian god Tammuz: "It confirms the view that the purpose for which the images and gardens of Adonis were thrown into the water was to effect the resurrection of the god, that is, to secure the revival of the vegetation." So then--how personally did the ancients see Adonis's revival? Did it just symbolize the vegetation, including their crops, coming alive again annually in spring? Did Adonis just continue to live because he had an immortal soul or immortality, and couldn't really die? Or did they believe their god was literally dead, and rose from the dead by a resurrection? Wagner contradicts Frazer's analysis by writing:

That Tammuz [who Frazer identifies with Adonis--EVS] is at once a 'god of resurrection' . . . and a 'god of salvation' is hardly perceptible. His death does not signify a sacrifice for sin, nor has it anything to do with eschatology [future prophetic events]. The fate of the dead . . . is not in his hands . . . his own death does not enable the god to give succour . . . In no sense at all is Adonis to be claimed as a dying-god, and there is no evidence that the worshipper of Adonis believed in a personal resurrection.

Concerning Osiris's supposed resurrection, he writes: "Osiris knew no resurrection, but was resuscitated to be a ruler of the Nether [under] world." To settle this issue, it's necessary to look at the original myths themselves, which unfortunately may only be accessible in Latin or Greek, not just secondary sources such as Frazer. I can quote Nash, who with his citations denies interpretations like Conder's (or Frazer's):

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<sup>101</sup>Nash, Gospel and the Greeks, pp. 126-27; my emphasis, Frazer, Golden Bough, vol. 1, pp. 299, 301, 330-31, 363.



Which mystery gods actually experienced a resurrection from the dead? Certainly no early texts refer to any resurrection of Attis. Attempts to link the worship of Adonis to a resurrection are equally weak. Nor is the case for a resurrection of Osiris any stronger. After Isis gathered together the pieces of Osiris's dismembered body, he became "Lord of the Underworld." . . . And of course no claim can be made that Mithras was a dying and rising god.

Nash elsewhere states, while evidently leaning on the research of Edwin Yamauchi: "Tammuz never rose from the dead. The texts used to support a resurrection of Adonis date between the second and fourth centuries A.D."<sup>102</sup> Again, the old chronology issue raises its ugly head--unless you can prove these texts concerning Adonis's resurrection are later descriptions of an older tradition, this cult's idea of the resurrection could not have influenced first-century Christianity. Of course, somebody may retort, "Nash and Wagner are biased traditional Christians!" But then, I could respond that Conder's main sources, Walker and Doane, have an evident bias against Christianity, and that Frazer is undeniably loose in his language in places, illegitimately using Christian terminology to describe events in various myths. To really settle this issue, it's necessary crack open copies of the ancient Greek and Latin classics, such as Plutarch, Ovid, Aeschylus, or whomever, and read the original texts. Since the weight of contemporary worldly scholarship in the fields of classics and Biblical studies is overwhelmingly against finding primitive (first-century) Christianity as dependent on the mystery religions for its teachings, this shows how they have interpreted the primary sources. German scholar Gunter Wagner has written: "That Paul modeled his Christ 'myth' on the myths about other 'dying and rising' gods is now no more seriously held than is the derivation of the observance of Sunday and of the resurrection on the third day from the mystery cults."<sup>103</sup> Conder's secondary sources (Doane, Hislop, and Walker in particular) are fundamentally based on outmoded, out-of-date scholarship, which has ominous implications for anybody placing his faith in Conder's research as a basis for denying Jesus as his Savior.

REASONS FOR FAITH: ARE THE PARALLELS TO PAGANISM NECESSARILY SO PROBLEMATIC?

Early in 1926 the hardest boiled of all the atheists I ever knew sat in my room on the other side of the fire and remarked that the evidence for the historicity of the gospels was really surprisingly good. 'Rum thing,' he went on. 'All that stuff of

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<sup>102</sup>Frazer, Golden Bough, vol. 1, pp. 278-80, 287-88; Wagner, Pauline Baptism, pp. 157, 261, 264; as cited in Nash, Gospel and the Greeks, pp. 292, 294; Nash, Gospel and the Greeks, pp. 172-73, 294.

<sup>103</sup>Gunter Wagner, Pauline Baptism and the Pagan Mysteries, p. 269. Evidently, he hasn't read Samuele Bacchiocchi's From Sabbath to Sunday! But the casual way he dismisses claims like Conder's illustrates the current climate of opinion among scholars. It isn't as if Christianity's alleged dependence on pagan thought and ritual is some hot topic which actively divides conservative and liberal scholars in the fields of Biblical studies and classics. If liberal, skeptical scholars in these fields gave up drawing parallels between the mystery religions and Christianity some time ago, then Conder's attempt to do the same is DOA.

Frazer's about the Dying God. Rum thing. It almost looks as if it had happened once.'

After C.S. Lewis heard these comments, they were the straw that broke the camel's back of his unbelief, directly leading to his embrace of Christianity. He knew the implications of the historical accuracy of the Gospels for his past atheism. The apparent similarities between certain pagan ideas and Christianity's he saw as a reason to believe, not to deny. After all, Satan is perfectly capable of reading Scripture and using it for his own purposes, such as when he tried to tempt Christ (Matt. 4:1-11). Satan also has manufactured a number of counterfeits that look like the real thing, but aren't, such as substituting Sunday for the Sabbath, Easter for the Passover, a false church for the true, etc. Is it really so surprising he would create religions that worship him, but which have elements of the truth in a perverted form? Satan may have long found it more successful to use half- and quarter-truths to deceive people, instead of manufacturing falsehoods whole cloth. By using something close to the truth in some regard, such as Sunday worship in place of the true Sabbath, he still holds people in his tangled web, while not making it so false that people "wake up" and become undeceived. Then another factor is involved--the extent to which pagans by natural revelation know there is a God of some sort, but create false ones of their own imaginations to worship. Just because many false gods have been worshipped in history doesn't prove there isn't a true one as well. Nor does paganism, generally being false, have to be totally false. After all, at least unlike atheists or agnostics, they are concerned with the supernatural, as men ought to be. However, their innate, natural desire to reach out for something greater than themselves has been perverted by some combination of Satan's influence and false human reasoning (compare Rom. 1:19-28; 2:14-15; Acts 17:22-28). Some of the pagans' knowledge also could be remnants of what God revealed to the antediluvian patriarchs, such as Adam and Noah. Lewis, a man who surely forgot more pagan mythology than most of us will ever learn, comments thus:

The heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact. The old myth of the Dying God, without ceasing to be myth, comes down from heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history. It happens--at a particular date, in a particular place, followed by definable historical consequences. We pass from a Balder or an Osiris, dying nobody knows when or where, to a historical Person crucified (it is all in order) under Pontius Pilate. By becoming fact it does not cease to be myth: that is the miracle. I suspect that men have sometimes derived more spiritual sustenance from myths they did not believe than from the religion they professed. To be truly Christian we must both assent to the historical fact and also receive the myth (fact though it has become) with the same imaginative embrace which we accord to all myths. The one is hardly more necessary than the other. . . . We must not be nervous about 'parallels' and 'Pagan Christs': they ought to be there--it would be a stumbling block if they weren't. We must not, in false spirituality, withhold our imaginative welcome. . . . For this is the marriage of heaven and earth: Perfect Myth and Perfect Fact: claiming not only our love and our obedience, but also our wonder and delight, addressed to the

savage, the child and the poet in each one of us no less than the moralist, the scholar, and the philosopher.<sup>104</sup>

We have to remember our religion is one of emotion, not just of reason, and that God wants our whole heart, mind, and soul, and He will fill both. Pagans who sensed the need for the divine, but were cut off from God, sought Him by ways that were not necessarily false in themselves (such as by prayer or animal sacrifices). The mere fact pagans have some ideas or ceremonies independently of Christianity (or Judaism) that at least superficially agree with the true religion does not automatically prove Christianity false, whether it be Aristotle's philosophical concept of the Prime Mover as God on the one hand, or some mythic caricature of some god dying then living being reenacted in a rite by ignorant, heathen peasants on the other. Human reason and emotion clumsily have made many pathetic attempts to reach for God, and had some glimmer of the truth (re: Acts 17:23, 28), but fell far short, and remained in deception. But just because Biblical religion may have served God in the same way superficially as the pagans doesn't mean those means are automatically invalid. Otherwise, Judaism's use of animal sacrifices is "pagan" because heathens offered animals to their gods as well (I Cor. 8:7; 10:19-20, 28). Nevertheless, since all attempts to serve God based on human reason or emotion will come up far short, the revelation of the true religion can only come from the top down, from the true God to man, since no pagan rite can give us eternal life. While above the supposed close similarities between Christianity and paganism, or the direct dependence of one on the other, was refuted, any remaining superficial similarities can be attributed to Satan's desire to counterfeit the truth to deceive people, some possible remnant of antediluvian revelation, and how even in religious affairs human reason and emotion can gain a small measure of the truth.

When Christianity is accused of being dependent for its theological content on pagan mystery religions because the two have similar ideas, there remains this possibility for explaining the superficial similarities: Could the mystery religions be a pale shadow, a caricature, of the truth? C.S. Lewis develops this theme at length in Miracles, and his analysis is so brilliantly stated, it's absurd for me to rewrite it. Note how he uses Frazer's ideas concerning the vegetation cycle and the corn-gods who personify it. This true master of the subject shows, by comparison, how utterly shallow and superficial Conder's scholarship and analysis of the mystery religions are. Having just mentioned the "deepest apprehensions" that Christian doctrine appears all too similar to that of various pagan mystery religions, he proceeds to deal with this seeming problem:

If Christianity is a religion of that kind why is the analogy of the seed falling into the ground so seldom mentioned (twice only if I mistake not) in the New Testament? Corn-religions [meaning "grain," not maize--EVS] are popular and respectable: if that is what the first Christian teachers were putting across, what motive could they have for concealing the fact? The impression they make is that of men who simply don't know how close they are to the

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<sup>104</sup>C.S. Lewis, Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life (New York: Walker and Co., 1986 (original publication, 1955)), p. 330. Incidentally, this story is dramatized in the movie "Shadowlands." C.S. Lewis, "Myth Becomes Fact," World Dominion (Sept./Oct. 1944), as reprinted in God in the Dock, pp. 66-67.

corn-religions: men who simply overlook the rich sources of relevant imagery and association which they must have been on the verge of tapping at every moment. If you say they suppressed it because they were Jews, that only raises the puzzle in a new form.

Why should be only religion of a "dying God" which has actually survived and risen to unexampled spiritual heights occur precisely among those people to whom, and to whom almost alone, the whole cycle of ideas that belong to the "dying God" was foreign? I myself, who first seriously read the New Testament when I was, imaginatively and poetically, all agog for the Death and Re-birth pattern and anxious to meet a corn-king, was chilled and puzzled by the almost total absence of such ideas in the Christian documents. One moment particularly stood out. A "dying God"--the only dying God who might possibly be historical--holds bread, that is, corn, in His hand and says, "This is my body." Surely here . . . the truth must come out; the connection between this and the annual drama of the crops must be made. But it is not. It is there for me. There is no sign that it was there for the disciples or (humanly speaking) for Christ Himself. It is almost He didn't realise what He had said. The records, in fact, show us a Person who enacts the part of the Dying God, but whose thoughts and words remain quite outside the circle of religious ideas to which the Dying God belongs. The very thing which the Nature-religions are all about seems to have really happened once: but it happened in a circle where no trace of Nature-religion was present. It is as if you met the sea-serpent and found that it disbelieved in sea-serpents.

He goes on to explain how Jehovah was a nature God yet also not a nature God.

On the one hand, Jehovah makes the crops grow, similar to the claims made on behalf of pagan gods like Bacchus and Ceres. In Judaism there is no trace of a religion that teaches nature is an illusion, that this life or matter is evil, etc., as in Buddhism, Hinduism, etc. Yet on the other hand, Jehovah "does not die and come to life each year as a true Corn-king should. He may give wine and fertility, but must not be worshipped with Bacchanalian or aphrodisiac rites." He is not nature nor an actual part of it, but is transcendent, and separate from His creation. Then Lewis draws this shattering conclusion:

Now if there is such a [True] God and if He descends to rise again, then we can understand why Christ is at once so like the Corn-King and so silent about him. He is like the Corn-King because the Corn-King is a portrait of Him. The similarity is not in the least unreal or [sic] accidental. For the Corn-King is derived (through human imagination) from the facts of Nature, and the facts of Nature from her Creator [cf. Rom. 1:19-20--EVS]; the Death and Re-birth pattern is in her because it was first in Him.<sup>105</sup>

So whatever superficial similarities that remain between the pagan mystery religions and Christianity, since Conder's case doesn't have a leg to stand on, merely reflect how human reason, cut off from the true God, still can gain a glimmer of the truth, even as it turns into idolatry and perversion. Paul

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<sup>105</sup>Lewis, Miracles, pp. 113-15.

explained this at length in the opening chapter of Romans (vs. 19-32). So it's time now to bury the Conder thesis of Christian dependence on the Mysteries for its doctrinal content or ceremonies, which is only sustainable through making superficial, anachronistic comparisons by shallow, obsolete, irresponsible scholarship.

#### DID PLATONISM OR HELLENISTIC PHILOSOPHY INFLUENCE FIRST-CENTURY CHRISTIANITY?

Compared to the weight placed on the pagan mystery religions influencing Christianity, Conder spends much less time trying to prove Gnostic or Platonic influence on it. The charge that Paul was a "platonic Jewish philosopher" who lifted ideas from the great Greek philosopher Plato (c. 428-348 or 347 b.c.) is made, but mostly left unelaborated upon (MB, p. 139; see also p. 140). Conder makes no attempt to quote Plato, and then quote the NT, and say the first influenced the second. Plato's works are readily available in English translation; I have a copy of his dialogues on one of my bookshelves. I challenge him to make specific examples of similarities between the two, by quoting Plato, using the standard numbering system for citations, and then quoting Paul out of the NT. But, it would repay his efforts to read Nash's refutation of these claims first.<sup>106</sup> Merely noting that the NT uses "Logos" (in John 1 for example) proves little or nothing about whether the Christian meaning of this word was identical with various pagan philosophical uses of it. (See part of Conder's gratuitous fantasy--meaning, his imaginative reconstruction of the life and ministry of Simon the Sorcerer, MB, p. 137). After all, this Greek word has a great number of definitions and meanings, including "word," "statement," "speech," "subject [being discussed]," "computation," "reason," "motive," etc. Since Christianity was attempting to communicate to the world in a language using words that pagans had long since used, necessarily some of the same words used by pagans to describe their gods would be used by Christians to describe the true God. But if a Christian calls Yahweh, "Theos," or "Kyrios," this does not prove he had the same ideas about that "theos" the pagans did who used the same word about their gods! Similarly, translating a word like "Messiah" into its Greek equivalent, "Christ," when both words mean "the anointed one," does not mean the Christians had the same doctrines about "the anointed one" some pagans may have had (vs. MB, p. 14). Furthermore, as Nash explains, the term "logos" as standing for a Being who would intercede between God and man need not have come from the Jewish philosopher Philo (c. 13 b.c. to 45 or 50 A.D.). Philo was so heavily influenced by Greek philosophy he bent his Jewish religion to fit it. Instead, the OT itself can easily be seen as the origin of John's use of the term "logos." For example, "wisdom" is personified in Proverbs 8:22-31, and says that she was created before the world was, and even participated in the creation of the world. British scholar T.W. Manson explains this OT tendency:

We find in the late Jewish literature [for example, in the apocryphal books Ecclesiasticus 24:1-23 and Wisdom of Solomon 7-9] a tendency to speak of the attributes of God as if they had a separate existence. This tendency is specially marked in the Wisdom literature. The passages that are specially relevant to our present problem are those in which the wisdom of God is to some degree personified.

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<sup>106</sup>Nash, Gospel and the Greeks, pp. 57-65.

An alternative possible source for John's use of the word "logos" is how in the OT sometimes the "word of God" is personified, so implying its independent existence from God Himself. For example, Ps. 33:6: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made," Ps. 107:20: "He sent His word and healed them," Ps. 147:15, 18: "He sends forth His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly . . . He sends forth His word and melts them," Isa. 9:8 (NASB, lit.): "The Lord sends a word against Jacob, and it falls on Israel." The most interesting case, and surely the best known, is Isa. 55:11: "So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it." Instead of seeing the author of the Gospel of John as dependent on Philo or some pagan thinker, his use of "logos" is much more likely due to, according to scholar T.W. Manson, both John and Philo borrowing from a common source, the Old Testament: "The points of similarity are just those that both have in common with the Old Testament notion of the 'word of God.' Philo's logos is really Stoicism blended with the Old Testament 'word of God.' John's logos is Jesus Christ understood in the light of the same Old Testament 'word of God.'"<sup>107</sup> Conder's strategic mistake here is to equate the use of the same words (i.e., "logos") in certain cases to mean Christians and pagans had the same religious doctrines connected with, and behind, those identical words. Once again, Conder mistakenly takes a superficial similarity--here, in vocabulary--and reads into it that the NT's authors depended on the pagan-influenced Jewish philosopher Philo, Plato, or some other pagan philosopher for their doctrines.

#### DID GNOSTICISM INFLUENCE FIRST-CENTURY CHRISTIANITY?

Conder claims that: "Simon [the Sorcerer, here presented as the real founder of Christianity--EVS] presented his theology in a package known as Gnosticism, which was a combination of different religious thought--including platonic philosophy" (MB, p. 137). In a footnote on the same page, he comments: "the foundations of Gnosticism had to remain within the church . . . the fathers of the Christian Church were so successful in their goal that all but the very astute can now see and understand the incredible influence of Gnosticism on the New Testament." So then, what is Gnosticism, first of all? Unfortunately, this has proven hard to define, in part due to the great diversity of beliefs that come under this label. Furthermore, how you define it may influence how plausible drawing comparisons between it and Christian doctrine are! But, using a standard philosophical dictionary, let's take a stab at it: "Gnosticism, like the mystery religions, claimed an esoteric wisdom, sharply distinguishing between the uninitiated and the initiated." Under the heading of "Gnosticism" generally comes at least some of the following beliefs: A marked sense of dualism, in which matter is evil but spirit is good, perhaps characterizes this religion above any other. The God of the Old Testament is identified as a stupid and evil god, a god of darkness, because he created the material world, but the god of the New Testament is good, a god of light. There is a series of intercessors between God and man, such as the angels or demons or other celestial beings, who emanated from God, not just one (Jesus) who eternally existed. Jesus (in particular) was believed to be one of the higher intermediary beings who descended to earth in order to help release the divine spark imprisoned in every man. Each human soul fell from the highest heavenly sphere into the

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<sup>107</sup>T.W. Manson, On Paul and John (London: SCM, 1963), pp. 163, 149; cited in Nash, Gospel and the Greeks, pp. 81-88.

material world, which caused it to be imprisoned in a material body. All these souls, divine sparks, were part of a Primal Man, who was torn apart by demons, who then made the world out of Him. These demons (or powers of darkness) carefully imprisoned the divine sparks, the souls, in human bodies, to insure the material world doesn't revert back to its original chaos. The basic purpose of gnosis (special knowledge) is to free the soul from the body, which is imparted by some savior sent to earth by the true God in order to redeem men. The special knowledge tells them about their former state, when living in the heavenly world, and how to return to it. Gnosticism tends towards one of two extremes in morality. It either is very ascetic and denies the desires of the flesh, including sex, since they are evil, or believes having special knowledge (the gnosis) made right behavior irrelevant, which encouraged immorality. Religious prostitution played a major part in Gnosticism when the Great Mother, the Goddess of Heaven, often called "Sophia" (wisdom), played a major role. (She was considered to have given birth to (or emanate) seven semi-evil, world-creating entities, or angels/demons, from which the powers of darkness (demons) are derived). Gnosticism taught the heresy called Docetism, which maintained Jesus did not come in the flesh, since matter by definition is evil. Instead, He only appeared to be a man with a human body, and really was a spirit being while on earth. Many Gnostics also got caught up in casting spells, making up magical formulas, and astrology. Because different Gnostic groups had different beliefs, not all would accept all the teachings just sketched out above; diversity of belief is the rule, not the exception, in this movement.<sup>108</sup> Now--just how is Christianity supposed to come out of this mish-mash?

Similar to claiming that Platonism influenced the NT, Conder gives almost no specific examples of alleged Gnostic influence on it, outside his gloss on the Greek word "logos." He never (say) quotes from the NT, and lines up a quote from the Gnostic Nag Hammadi "gospels," or some other source document, and says the latter influenced the former (see MB, pp. 137, 139; cf. pp. 22, 91, fn. 21). Actually, there are repeated contradictions between the canonical Gospels and Letters of the NT as against Gnostic teaching. The fact various early Catholic Church fathers (such as Tertullian, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus) attacked Gnostic ideas, such as those held by Marcion, Valentinus, and Menander, shows here they were merely following the NT's teachings fairly closely. In particular, John, supposedly the writer who was influenced by Gnosticism the most, spends considerable time attacking, directly or indirectly, certain Gnostic ideas. In particular, Docetism, the teaching that Jesus Christ did not have a body of flesh and blood while He was on earth, is attacked in the strongest possible terms in II John 7 (cf. I John 4:2-3): "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist." John makes a point of saying the Word--the Logos--"became flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14) and he not only saw and heard Jesus, but touched Him as well (I John 1:1): "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we behold and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life . . ." Also, Biblical Christianity avoids the extremes of dualism and asceticism. Nowhere does the NT say matter, the human body, or sex in itself is intrinsically evil, as opposed to evil human nature living in the flesh, which perverts these gifts. As C.S. Lewis remarked: "He

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<sup>108</sup>William L. Reese, Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion: Eastern and Western Thought (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1980), pp. 192-93; Nash, Gospel and the Greeks, pp. 39-40, 213-24.

[God] uses material things like bread and wine to put the new life in us. We may think this rather crude and unspiritual. God does not: He invented eating. He likes matter. He invented it." God called His creation "very good" (Gen. 1:31), which couldn't be true if it was intrinsically evil. Paul attacked those who forbade marriage, and those who opposed eating various foods, and wished to mortify the flesh (I Tim. 4:2-5; Col. 2:17, 21-23). The Gnostics believed in a complicated series of intermediary beings that emanated from God, but Paul believed Jesus Christ was the lone intermediary between God and Man, and that the angels should not be worshipped (Col. 1:18; I Tim. 2:5). Furthermore, ideas of John's such as the "descent-ascent" motif, concerning Jesus coming to earth and returning to heaven, need not be seen as Greek (Hellenistic) in origin. The Dead Sea Scroll discoveries of the Jewish Essene sect's writings show ideas like John's were floating around in first-century Judaism, as NT scholar George Ladd sees:

Even if direct dependence cannot be established between John and the Qumran [Dead Sea Scroll area] writings, the similarities have proven that the idiom and thought patterns of the Fourth Gospel could have arisen in Palestine in the mid-first century A.D.--a position few critical scholars of a generation ago would have dared to support. . . . Many contemporary scholars now recognize a solid Johannine tradition independent of the Synoptics [Mark, Luke, and Matthew], stemming from Palestine and dating from A.D. 30-66, and attribute to the Fourth Gospel a degree of historical worth hardly dreamed of a generation ago except by the most conservative scholars.

These discoveries seriously undermine attempts like that by the very influential liberal Protestant theologian Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) to link Gnosticism or some Greek pagan influence to the author of the fourth Gospel. Furthermore, most interestingly, there is no direct evidence that the Gnostic redeemer myth existed before 30 A.D. As NT scholar Stephen Neill commented: "The idea that such a belief existed in pre-Christian times is simply a hypothesis and rests on nothing more than highly precarious inference backwards from a number of documents which themselves are known to be of considerably later origin." For example, Bultmann used literature produced by the Mandaean religion which post-dates the NT by several centuries, and projected its ideas backwards to having existed before the NT and the first century, without any real evidence that in fact such ideas did exist then.<sup>109</sup> Saying the NT uses the Greek word "logos" proves almost nothing, since what matters is the definition of this term, and whether some pagan or semi-pagan thinker was the source of the NT's use and definition of it. However, until Conder actually produces some arguments by citing various texts that indeed Christianity is like Gnosticism, and does so on a more than a superficial level (re: his take on the mystery religions' similarities to Christianity), there's little reason to detain further the reader by trying to counter-attack something for which no real argument has been put forward to begin with!

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<sup>109</sup>C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (New York: Collier Books, Macmillan Publishing Co., 1952), p. 65; George Aldon Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 219 and/or 220; Stephen Neill, The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 179 and/or 180; both as cited in Nash, Gospel and the Greeks, pp. 226-27, 236-37.



## CHRISTIANITY DID NOT DEPEND ON PAGAN RELIGIONS FOR ITS DOCTRINES: A SUMMARY

Above, Conder's claims that Christianity got its doctrinal content mainly from pagan religion and philosophy have been weighed, and found wanting. To pursue all the specifics of this subject (or other issues Conder raises) would be surely mind-numbing. This can't be done here without turning this essay into a book. Enough of Conder's specific points about the tie of Christianity and "pagan savior gods" have been refuted above to cast extreme doubt on his case. His fundamental error is to use outmoded and/or extremely biased scholarship in the form of such people as Doane, Walker, Hislop, even Frazer some, and make superficial and/or anachronistic comparisons between this or that pagan rite and Christianity, and say the latter got its ideas from the former. Ominously for Mystery Babylon, such claims have been rejected by more recent scholarship in the fields of classics and Biblical Studies, evidently even among theological liberals who reject Christian faith as having supernatural origins. Fox, who's hardly pro-Christian, emphatically denied Brown's claim that the Roman Empire's paganism and Christianity were part of a "common Mediterranean religious culture." Fox says he wishes "to establish the opposite view," and maintains: "Early Christianity arrived with very distinctive roots. Grafted onto the Old Testament, it was not easily smothered, not even by the established ground cover of the pagan towns."<sup>110</sup> And if mainline liberal Protestants or agnostic classical scholars have thrown overboard theories that closely tie paganism to Christianity as false or unprovable, despite they philosophically may like them to be true, Conder's case is DOA. Furthermore, HOW CAN ANYONE PROVE ANYTHING ABOUT NIMROD OR SIMON THE SORCEROR OUTSIDE THE PAGES OF THE BIBLE?<sup>111</sup> Conder also systematically dismisses how various Christian doctrines and ceremonies had Jewish precedents, such as baptism, the OT animal sacrifices prefiguring Jesus' sacrifice, etc. It's absurd to attribute Jesus' statement in Luke 21:27 to Babylonian religion supposedly teaching that Nimrod will come back in great power to rule as king of kings. Actually, it's nothing more than a citation of Dan. 7:13! (See MB, pp. 69-70). Then C.S. Lewis's insights should be carefully considered: Whatever resemblances there are between pagan religions and Christianity may reflect what highly limited religious truths human reason and emotion can find on its own. The pagan rites merely then are a pale shadow of Christian truths, which are the ultimate revelation from God in this age. Anyone disturbed by Conder's case arguing for the alleged direct dependence of Christianity on pagan religion and philosophy, in which the former took its teachings from the latter, should put their minds at ease. If you are still concerned, you should consider pursuing the references in Nash's book, and those in Conder's book to the original sources (not the secondary works so much) of the myths themselves, and check if Conder's case can hold up under close scrutiny. Consider the implications of the exercise conducted

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<sup>110</sup>Fox, Pagans and Christians, pp. 21-22.

<sup>111</sup>Even posing this question may prove fatal to Conder's first volume dealing with paganism's influence on traditional Christianity. I have been informed, but have seen no confirmation in print, that the author of Babylon Mystery Religion: Ancient and Modern, Ralph Edward Woodrow, has written a book called Babylon Revisited. In it he attacks Hislop's Two Babylons, says Hislop misused his sources, and maintains you can't (basically) trace all pagan religion back to Nimrod. Those who liked Conder's first book on this subject may wish to look for Woodrow's critique of Hislop, and see if it can stand up to serious scrutiny as well.

above, in which I actually looked up Aeschylus's play Prometheus Chained. Doane's reference to it in Conder (MB, p. 62) was proven to be a hopelessly biased and superficial, even consciously dishonest, comparison between Christianity and paganism. Doing more such work on your own may prove to be utterly deadly to Conder's claims that his secondary sources such as Walker and Doane "in most cases . . . have correctly used their sources" (MB, p. 64). There's little to believe, and lots to doubt, in Conder's claims that Christianity largely received its doctrinal content from pagan religion and philosophy.<sup>112</sup>

### 3. THE MESSIANIC PROPHECIES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT AS QUOTED IN THE NEW: WERE THEY TAKEN OUT OF CONTEXT?

Much of Conder's work is taken up with an assault on the messianic prophecies as referring to Jesus of Nazareth, saying they were quoted out of context, etc. To really understand the issues he raises, you have to enter the frame of mind of someone who knows only the OT, and nothing about the NT or Jesus. Pretend you were a Greek-speaking Jew in what is now modern day Turkey in (say) A.D. 45. Some fellow by the name of Paul visits your city's synagogue one Sabbath, and argues a certain man named Jesus was the promised Messiah (the anointed one, "Christ" in Greek). You, being a lifelong dweller in this mostly pagan city, never have set eyes on the Holy Land, let alone this Jesus of Nazareth. He cites various texts from the Hebrew Scriptures to support his viewpoint. How would you check him out? The Bereans of Thessalonica (part of Greece) didn't just blindly accept what Paul and Silas told them about Jesus, but: "they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). When discussing religion with a Jew today (when he is open-minded and receptive), or those who have converted to Judaism, such as Conder, you have to go through the same texts that Paul would have used in the first century A.D.

#### WHAT IS THE FOUNDATION OF OUR FAITH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

Before proceeding with this exercise, we Christians have to consider the foundation of our faith in Jesus as the Messiah and our Savior. Is the main proof to be found in Jesus' resurrection from the dead, or in lining up OT prophecies that are fulfilled in Him? Can we--should we--try to read the OT as if we weren't believers in the NT already, while checking out various citations in the latter of the former? If the resurrection is the foundation of our faith, then organizing the data of the OT to fit Jesus' claims to be the Messiah (Matt. 16:13-17; Mark 16:61-62; John 4:25-26) makes perfect sense. But, can we line up all the prophecies the NT quotes from the OT to fit perfectly while pretending we don't know of the resurrection or any of the miracles Jesus performed? This is rather problematic. We have to consider always the primary, even exclusive sign, of Jesus' Messiahship was His resurrection from the dead, according to Jesus Himself (Matt. 12:39-40). Thus, many of the OT texts that involve types (for example, Ex. 12:46 in John

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<sup>112</sup>Whether the Old Testament was influenced by paganism is another rock I've left unturned above. But this article warns us of the past claims of liberal scholarship on this score: Darris M. McNeely, "Sermon summary: Are the Holy Days pagan in their origin?," In Transition, March 25, 1996, p. 10.

19:33) become a supplementary proof that Jesus was the Messiah, not the primary proof that can refute all skeptical challenges against using them. But those texts that make direct, predictive prophecies, such as Dan. 9:24-27, or which cause virtual contradictions in the OT when considered by itself, are much stronger, and can't be casually dismissed. In other words, if the NT can be proven to be historically reliable and be without contradiction within itself or with the OT (which are necessary (basic minimal) criteria for inspiration) and to have successful fulfilled prophecy in it (fundamentally, a decisive, or sufficient, condition for inspiration), then the OT messianic texts are largely additional proof for our position. Many of them aren't the knock-out blow that overcomes all disbelief, whether by Jews, agnostics, atheists, etc, although those of a specifically predictive kind still retain much force. The OT Messianic texts as a whole appear contradictory when the NT insight upon them is dismissed, a point developed below. John Wheeler, a Global Church of God laymember who can read Hebrew, explained it thus, although I think he goes too far in denying the force that some OT messianic texts do have:

Here is the key to understanding the use of "fulfilled Scripture" in the Gospels: The readers of the Gospels either already believed that Jesus was the Messiah or were being drawn by the Father to Him (John 6:44). The Gospels do not attempt to argue people into belief. They simply assume the Messiahship of Jesus, just as the Hebrew Bible assumes the existence of God. They then look back at Hebrew Scripture in the light of that fact, and point out certain patterns--some predictive prophecy, some direct typology, and some typology or partial fulfillment only visible after the fact. . . . the Gospels challenge people with evidence for Jesus' Messiahship. That evidence does not lie in "fulfilled Scripture" as such, but in the testimony regarding His life, death and resurrection. "Fulfilled Scripture" (of whatever kind) merely underline[s?] that testimony after the fact. . . . So the "sign of Jonah" really is key in all aspects of "fulfilled Scripture" as regards the Messiah. If one rejects this sign, no other proof (biblical or otherwise) suffices. Accept this sign, and all else follows.<sup>113</sup>

Such an explanation points to the proofs for the resurrection, already surveyed above, to be the foundation for Christians' faith in Jesus, leaving the OT messianic prophecies involving types (I would add) to be more suggestive than decisive.

#### WHAT TYPES ARE, AND HOW THEY DIFFER FROM DIRECT PREDICTIVE PROPHECY

Now, what exactly are types? They are that, "which are a shadow of things to come" (Col. 2:17). These are quite different from direct fulfilled prophecy, in which a predicted event occurs literally as it was originally said to, such as the destruction of Babylon or Nineveh (Isa. 13:19-22; Zeph. 2:13). Scholar Dr. James Smith explains it thus:

Sometimes New Testament writers use Old Testament prophecies merely because they see an analogy. They borrow Old Testament language without intending to suggest that the prediction-

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<sup>113</sup>Wheeler, "Letter to Eric Snow," pp. 2, 4.

fulfillment relationship exists between the two statements. [This would explain how such texts as Ps. 41:9; 34:20; Jer. 31:15; Hosea 11:1 are used in the NT as referring to the Messiah; cf. MB, pp. 74-75, 79--EVS]. Even when they declare that a prophecy was fulfilled there is sometimes a question as to whether or not they mean that the Old Testament statement was a direct prediction of that which is said to fulfill it (e.g., Matt. 13:14, 15).

A type is something, such as an animal, ritual, or object, that will stand for, as a forerunner of something else to come, but doesn't make any direct, specific predictions verbally. For example, the Passover lamb was "an unblemished male" (Ex. 12:5), which pictured Jesus, the sinless God made flesh who died for humanity's sins. Obviously, Exodus 12:5 predicts nothing explicitly in words about a promised Messiah to die for humanity's sins. It (the sheep) remains just a suggestive physical object picturing what is to come--something only really knowable upon fulfillment and further revelation (i.e., the NT) to explain its meaning. Smith defines a "type" as: "A description of an event, institution or person designed by God to be distinctly prophetic of the Messiah and his kingdom."<sup>114</sup> A number of the OT messianic texts cited in the NT do not come from direct discussions of the Messiah, but they involve secondary meanings which become only clear in the light of the NT's revelation of Jesus as our promised Savior. A particularly good example of this is Matthew's wordplay in chapter 2, verse 23, "He shall be called a Nazarene." Conder finds this absurd, but let's dig deeper (MB, p. 39). This prophecy refers back to Isa. 11:1, in which the Messiah is referred to as a "branch," which in Hebrew is "netzer." As Frydland explains: "The town Natzeret is the word Netzer plus the feminine ending, designated by the letter Tav. . . . He is to be a Branch [cf. Isa. 4:2; Jer. 23:5, where a different word for 'branch' is used, 'tsemah'] and also would live in the town Natzeret. He is a Netzer from Natzeret."<sup>115</sup> So it's also necessary to remember the principle of duality in Biblical interpretation, in which some scripture has a primary meaning or fulfillment, and an earlier and/or lesser meaning or fulfillment. Hence, the animal sacrifices had a certain meaning for ancient Israelites in rendering service to God, but they also pointed forward to the day when God Himself would be the sacrifice to the world's humans.

#### THE SUGGESTIVE TYPE FOUND IN ABRAHAM'S NEAR SACRIFICE OF ISAAC ON THE ALTAR

Let's take an example from the lives of the Patriarchs of types in action. God tested Abraham to offer up Isaac on the altar, "your only son, whom you love . . . and offer him there as a burnt offering" (Gen. 22:2). Now while going up to Mount Moriah, Isaac asked his father, "Behold, the fire and the wood [we have], but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham replied: "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son" (Gen. 22:7-8). Later, the angel of the Eternal stopped Abraham from killing his son on the altar, saying he knew "that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me" (Gen. 22:12). Then, Abraham's earlier statement to Isaac, possibly then stated as a half-truth to conceal Isaac's fate from him, was fulfilled literally: "Then Abraham raised

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<sup>114</sup>James Smith, What the Bible Teaches about the Promised Messiah (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), pp. 6, 9.

<sup>115</sup>Frydland, What the Rabbis Know about the Messiah, pp. 27-28.

his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son" (Gen. 22:13). An ancient Israelite, pouring over this story of his great ancestor, would likely see it as proof of Abraham's great faith and devotion to God, which is surely part of the primary meaning of the incident. But the Christian, in the light of the NT, sees more: Abraham here served as a type of God the Father who offered up "His only begotten Son" (John 3:16), His "beloved Son" (Matt. 3:17), for the sins of the world. Isaac initially served as a stand-in for Jesus, the son of God the Father, when placed on the altar. Then, what he represented suddenly changed, at the moment the angel of the Lord stopped Abraham from killing him. He now represented humanity as a whole being saved from death due to its sins. Isaac's (re: humanity's) place was taken by the ram, an adult male sheep. At that point, the ram became what prefigured Jesus in this incident, what "The Lord Will Provide" (Gen. 22:14) to humanity, to redeem it from an otherwise certain death. John the Baptist knew this, so when he saw Jesus, he proclaimed: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Now, when noting types like those in this incident, they are suggestive, but not decisive, as evidence for the NT's description of Jesus as the Messiah, dying for mankind's sins. After all, some Jew or agnostic could always wave away the parallels, and deny the secondary meaning found in this story that becomes so evident to the Christian mind in the light of the NT. But when this theme crops up time and again in the OT, the evidence from types isn't so easily dismissed, helping indicate that the animal sacrifices may have some meaning and purpose beyond testing people in how much they will serve God by devoting valuable things to Him. Clearly, the NT quotes from OT texts that don't have any clear connection in their primary meaning, judging from the immediate context, to the Messiah. But this does not mean that they have been "quoted out of context." Conder's strategic mistake is to assume the NT's citation of types in the OT are "quotes taken out of context." A secondary meaning also can be found in them, perhaps only discernable to a mind under the direct inspiration of God after the (implied) prophesied events in question have occurred. Christians have to avoid looking at all the messianic texts cited in the NT as direct, prophetic statements that will be literally fulfilled, as using the texts' primary meanings, and see more of them as subtle, analogous types, drawing upon the OT's secondary meanings.

#### OT PROPHETS CAN SUDDENLY CHANGE SUBJECTS AND TIMES WITHOUT WARNING

Conder complains that the author of Matthew 2:6 misused Micah 5:2, saying that this prophecy isn't fulfilled until the kingdom of God is established on earth when the Conquering Messiah arrives:

Turn to Micah 5 and read this verse in context of the chapter: the time-setting is the end when the restoration of Israel takes place! I ask you here, and will ask repeatedly before the end of this book, where is the 2,000 year gap between the coming of the Messiah, the restoration of Israel, and the Kingdom of God [I will stand corrected--but isn't that a term found only in the NT?--EVS] to be found in the entirety of "Old" Testament prophecy? (MB, p. 35).

Micah 5:2-3 describes where the Messiah was to be born: "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity. Therefore, He will give them up until the

time when she who is in labor has borne a child . . ." But then, a description of what would occur when the Conquering Messiah sets up the kingdom of God ensues in vs. 3-5. The principal issue Conder's point raises yet simultaneously ignores is how the OT prophets will suddenly change subject midstream, or ignore the time element by telescoping together two events that may be separated by centuries. This explains such a text as Hosea 11:1, which otherwise looks like it was quoted out of context by Matthew.<sup>116</sup> The best example of this concerns Isaiah's and Ezekiel's descriptions of Satan. In both cases, they are initially describing someone else, then suddenly they switch to another, greater spiritual being, and then switch back--and it's not altogether clear when and/or whether the change back occurs! Before describing Satan in vs. 12-15, Isaiah begins with a "taunt against the king of Babylon" (v. 4), and evidently shifts back in v. 16. Similarly, with the difference that the persons found in it are much more easily distinguishable, Ezekiel 28, condemns the "leader of Tyre" in vs. 2-10. Then Ezekiel goes after "the king of Tyre," who quite clearly is Satan, not some human king, in verses 12-17--and it's not altogether obvious where he switches to the actual king of Tyre in this section, if at all. (If he doesn't change back, then Satan is clearly prophesied to be totally destroyed into nothingness, not eternally tortured, in vs. 18-19: "And I have turned you to ashes on the earth in the eyes of all who see you . . . and you will be no more.") An example of the time element evidently being discounted occurs in Eze. 26:12-14. Verse 14 has yet to be (completely?) fulfilled since the present village of Sur lies on part of the spot where ancient Tyre was, while v. 12 was fulfilled by Alexander the Great (especially) in 332 b.c. Now, when it's a given that the OT prophets engage in sudden subject or time changes with little or no explicit warnings, correctly interpreting Micah 5:2-5 suddenly takes on a different complexion. A time jump could have occurred in between the first and last parts of v. 3, though it takes the light of the NT to make this fully clear. A similar case of this occurs in Luke 4:18-19, when Jesus quotes from Isa. 61:1-2. Jesus suddenly stops mid-sentence and mid-verse, and doesn't quote "and the day of vengeance of our God." Why? Because this part of the prophecy wouldn't be fulfilled during His First Coming's ministry, He didn't cite it, while the rest of it would be, so He did. The same principle applies to Isa. 11:1-9, in which the first three (maybe three and a half) verses were fulfilled when Jesus first came, but the remainder will be

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<sup>116</sup>Besides being typical, an obvious change in subject briefly occurs between Hosea 11:1 and Hosea 11:2, with a switch back in v. 3, which means it doesn't refer to the Messiah in v. 2. (See MB, p. 38 for Conder's analysis).

As Smith observes, the subject is a singular first person in v. 1 ("I"--God is speaking), but plural in v. 2 ("they"--false prophets probably). The object changes also, from singular ("my son") to a plural generally occurring in verses 2-4. The transition from v. 1 to v. 2 is quite rough grammatically.

Smith runs the intriguing argument that v. 1 stands alone, as a separate revelation (as v. 12 does in the NASB), since Hosea didn't write whole chapters on single subjects in chapter 4-13, but had various short revelations that were eventually put together. He contends that Hosea 11:1 should be attached to the prior chapter's last unit, that began in 10:9. This is unconvincing, because Hosea 11:3 uses the same parent/child analogy as v. 1 does. It's best to see this as a type mainly, with the grammatical shift from v. 1 to v. 2 signaling a change in the subject suddenly away from the Messiah (as a type, in its secondary meaning) to physical Israel itself (where this secondary meaning doesn't apply). For an interesting but flawed analysis of this text, see Smith, Promised Messiah, pp. 237-42.

fulfilled with the Second Coming. The same applies to Mal. 3:1-2, in which the first verse was fulfilled in the first century A.D., while the second is yet to occur. There's simply no compelling reason to believe everything in a given prophecy has to happen all at the same time; Dan. 11 is sufficient proof of this, with v. 41+ being unfulfilled at this time, but the rest has already occurred. Conder's strategic mistake with Micah 5:2 clearly is to think that just because following verses (3b-5) are placed in the future, the whole prophecy has to be.

#### DOES MICAH 5:2 HAVE TO REFER TO A FAMILY/CLAN INSTEAD OF A SPECIFIC PLACE?

Conder also criticizes the NT's use of Micah 5:2 for taking "Bethlehem Ephrathah" as a specific location as the birthplace of the Messiah, not a family or clan "that originated in this region" (MB, p. 35). This criticism's first problem is that the NT clearly portrays people who aren't Christians as interpreting this prophecy as referring to a specific location. For example, note John 7:41-42: "Still others were saying . . . 'Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?'" Similarly, Herod the Great (73-4 b.c.) inquired at his court about where the Messiah was to be born. The "chief priests and scribes of the people" replied, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet, 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a Ruler, who will shepherd my people Israel'" (Matt. 2:4-6). Notice that this gloss (explanation) on Mich 5:2 isn't a direct editorial comment by Matthew himself. Then, the word translated "among the clans" in the NASB for Micah 5:2 literally means "the among the thousands" (See Green's Interlinear Bible).

The Hebrew word "alapim" isn't the standard term for a subdivision of a tribe, for that was either mispahah ("family," "clan," "sub-tribe") or elep. Archer explains it thus: "Well, in this context it is clear that it is a town that is being addressed, rather than a literal army unit. Possibly towns were so referred to (cf. I Sam. 23:23) because they contained a thousand families, or else because they were capable of mustering at least a thousand men-at-arms for the national militia." Perhaps Bethlehem, the city of David, where his family was from, was being equated with those who actually lived there, as synonymous. There's also another reason to see this as a specific geographic location, because, as Smith maintains: "Ephrathah was either the district in which Bethlehem was located, or an ancient name for the town. The double name distinguishes his birth place from the northern Bethlehem in the tribal area of Zebulun (Josh. 19:15)." David's father Jesse was called "an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah" (I Sam. 17:12). This verse also has one particularly interesting implication in favor of the Messiah being God, since He is said to have pre-existed from long ago: "His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity" (Micah 5:2). What average human could this be said of? Remember, this couldn't fit King David, because he would have to have continuously lived from the time he died until being born again as a baby, a period of (say) 250 years! The Targum Jonathan, an ancient Jewish paraphrase of the Hebrew Bible in Aramaic that dates from the second century A.D., rendered/interpreted Micah 5:2 thus: "And you, O Bethlehem Ephrath, you who were too small to be numbered among the thousands of the house of Judah, from you shall come forth before Me the Messiah, to exercise dominion over Israel, he whose name was mentioned from before, from the days of creation." Even Jews saw this as a messianic text!<sup>117</sup> Clearly, there are good reasons to take

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<sup>117</sup>Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, p. 319; Smith, Promised Messiah, p. 332; Targum Jonathan, as quoted in Rosen, Y'Shua, p. 70.

Micah 5:2 as referring to a specific geographical location, not just the clan/family from which the Messiah would be born.

#### DAVID AS A TYPE (FORERUNNER) OF CHRIST IN PSALM 22

Conder attacks Ps. 22 as a messianic prophecy, coming up with a most curious general principle: "Yet, there is one fundamental of prophetic study: if one verse of the chapter is a prophecy, then so are the rest! In other words, you cannot pick and choose a single verse simply because it is convenient to your doctrine!" (MB, p. 73). But is this true? Almost casually, I found Ezekiel 31 to violate this "fundamental of prophetic study," since verses 2-9 describes Assyria's greatness. It then shifts over to a prophecy of downfall in verses 10-18, serving an example of warning to Pharaoh and Egypt as well. Let's have some proof for this claim! More specific to Ps. 22 is Conder's point that without the Christian church using this Psalm as about Jesus' death, "no one would have ever considered it to be a prophecy of the Messiah!" (MB, p. 73). This again raises the issue discussed above about the differences between types and direct literal fulfillments. Unlike the case for the books of Leviticus and Exodus in particular, in which animals served as types, in Ps. 22 a particular human serves as a type--King David. Although he was an imperfect man (II Sam. 12:27; I Chron. 22:8), in this Psalm, he served as a type of Christ's sufferings while on the cross, just as the imperfect animal sacrifices also foreshadowed the death of Jesus as Savior. This Psalm isn't put in the form of a direct prediction of what would come, which Conder mistakenly assumes it has to be the case for any OT prophecy before the NT could actually cite it as referring to the Messiah. Let's stop assuming something cited as a type is taken "out of context"! Again, something serving as a type doesn't have to make some specific verbal prediction to serve as a foreshadowing of what would come in the future. Importantly, this means that not all of this Psalm need apply literally to Christ and be fulfilled in every detail, since it describes a type, and isn't an actual prophecy. (This same reasoning explains why the NT cites Ps. 69 some seven times, although it isn't an actual predictive prophecy).<sup>118</sup> Nevertheless, when reading this Psalm all the way through, instead of jumping back and forth out of it, much of it serves as a convincing and remarkable description of the scenes of the Messiah's suffering on the cross. (Conder feels the need to skip to considering Ps. 34 and Isa. 53 briefly before returning to it, only to go off to Zech. 12, and back again. See MB, pp. 73-79).

First in Psalms 22 there's the dramatic opening cry, which Christ quoted while on the cross in Aramaic (v. 1): "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" People ridiculed him, just as occurred to Christ (vs. 6-7): "But I am a worm, and not a man, a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, 'Commit yourself to the Lord; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.'" Compare this with Luke 23:35-37, 39; Matt. 27:39-44;

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<sup>118</sup>As Joseph A. Alexander explained: "The subject of the [sixty-ninth] psalm is an ideal person, representing the whole class of righteous sufferers. The only individual in whom the various traits meet is Christ. That he is not, however, the exclusive or even the immediate subject, is clear from the confession in verse 6 (5)." The Psalms, Translated and Explained (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975), as cited by Smith, Promised Messiah, p. 131.



Mark 15:29-32. For some reason, Conder insists on taking the metaphorical for the literal, when saying Jesus could not have been referred to as a worm, and not a man, which discounts Jesus' pathetic physical plight at the time (MB, p. 74). The description of suffering in verses 14-17, while also metaphorical, also is rather medically accurate for someone undergoing crucifixion:

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; and Thou dost lay me in the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me.

This form of execution was unknown in Judea at the time David wrote (c. 1030 b.c.). Stoning was the traditional method of execution among the Jews, with crucifixion and/or impalement being the method of capital punishment for the Assyrians, Persians, Greeks (especially by Alexander the Great), and Romans, who all rose to power in later centuries. Only by supernatural inspiration could have David described the agonies of dying in a way totally unknown in his culture. Finally, like Christ, David describes his clothes being gambled for by his persecutors (v. 18): "They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." Compare Matt. 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:24. It's rather unlikely this actually happened to King David; rather, this foreshadows something to come in Someone Else's earthly life. While it's true David didn't describe his death in the Psalm, this makes sense, for presumably he lived some years after it was written. And, not all of it fits David's life well. Consider verse 27: "All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will worship before Thee." As Smith remarks: "No Old Testament person could have imagined that his personal deliverance from death [cf. verses 19-21--EVS] could be the occasion for the world's conversion." Since something serving as a type doesn't need to match the eventual reality in all details since it isn't a specific prediction of the future, and since the OT prophets would zoom in and out on particular subjects without warning even within single verses, Ps. 22 can be considered remarkable evidence that Jesus' death on the cross was foreshadowed in the OT.<sup>119</sup>

WAS "THEY PIERCED MY HANDS AND MY FEET" IN THE ORIGINAL HEBREW?

"They pierced my hands and my feet" (Psalms 22:16). Conder makes a big production of citing the standard reading of the Hebrew Masoretic text to deny that Psalms 22:16 refers to the crucifixion (MB, p. 78). He, following the Jews, use a different reading which avoids its obvious application to the sufferings of Christ. It has "like a lion" in place of "they pierced," which produces this intrinsically unlikely reading: "like a lion my hands and feet." Only by inserting additional words can this make any sense. These two readings are based upon changing one similarly shaped final consonant for another in the Hebrew word in contention. If the word was "kaaru," it meant "they have pierced," while if it was "kaari," it was "like a lion." In Hebrew, the word for "pierced" ends with the Hebrew letter vav, while for "lion" it ends with a yod. As Rosen describes, an ancient scribe could have easily mistaken one for the other: "Vav and yod are similar in form, and a

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<sup>119</sup>McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, pp. 161-162; Rosen, Y'Shua, p. 45. On Ps. 22 generally, see Smith, Promised Messiah, pp. 145-54.

scribe might easily have changed the text by inscribing a yod and failing to attach a vertical descending line so that it would become a vav." Importantly, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, made some time before Jesus was born (c. 250-100 b.c.), does contain the reading "they pierced." The witness of the Syriac and Latin translations of the Old Testament also backs the Septuagint, as well as some manuscripts of the Hebrew text! The margin of The NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament, vol. 3, p. 368, states that: "The NIV reads with some mss. karu or k-'-r-w, they pierced." The Ginsberg Hebrew Bible noted this alternative reading is found in "other scrolls" and was placed in three of the earliest mechanically printed editions of the Hebrew text. Also, in a Jewish medieval anthology (thirteenth century A.D.), Yalkut Shimoni (687), Rabbi Nehemiah commented on Ps. 22:16, using the reading that says "pierced." This shows at least some rabbis accepted it as part of the original text. This all combines to show that "they pierced" was the original text, not "like a lion."

Conder accuses Strong's of scholastic dishonesty when saying the Hebrew word here is #1856 instead of #738 ("like a lion"). Instead, it appears all Strong did was make a textual correction based upon the Septuagint, the Syriac, the Vulgate, and/or use the minority reading of the Masoretic text. Conder says that Gesenius' says that #1856 "simply means to kill by running through, which renders this word useless in the context of Psalms 22" (MB, p. 78). Actually, Gesenius' (p. 206) says about #1856: "To thrust through, to pierce, as with a sword or spear." Brown-Driver-Briggs (p. 201) has "pierce, pierce through . . . pierce, run through . . . be pierced through, slain . . . pierced, riddled, (i.e. desperately wounded) warriors." Really, no problem crops up here. Conder (MB, p. 78) attacks the idea that Jesus could have been crucified by having nails driven into his hands thus: "It is a known fact that victims of crucifixion, if they were nailed to a cross, didn't have the nails driven through their hands, as they wouldn't have supported the weight of the body. They were driven through the forearms, which hardly qualifies as the hands of Psalms 22." But Jehovah's Witnesses reply to this argument thus: "Since the wrists have always been considered by anatomists as part of the hands, some medical men think the nails were driven between the small bones of the wrists to prevent the stripping out that could have occurred if driven through the palms--See Arizona Medicine, March, 1965, p. 184." If this indeed is correct, Conder's critique is groundless. Taken altogether, it makes much more sense to see the original reading of Ps. 22:16 as, "They pierced my hands and my feet," instead of, "Like a lion my hands and my feet."<sup>120</sup>

ZECHARIAH 12:10--WILL END-TIME JEWS LOOK UPON THE GOD THEY PIERCED?

"And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born" (Zech. 12:10). In this most striking verse, the "Me" is clearly God. How could God become "pierced" or otherwise physically wounded? The Almighty God has to become flesh in order to be "pierced"! A hint of the doctrine of Jesus being the only begotten Son first born from the dead is found in the statements about mourning "for an only son" and "weeping over a first-born." How does Conder attempt to duck the implications of this verse?

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<sup>120</sup>Rosen, Y'shua, pp. 45-46, 74; Smith, Promised Messiah, p. 150; Aid to Bible Understanding, p. 824; The NIV Interlinear and Ginsberg Bible as cited by Wheeler, "Letter to Eric Snow," p. 7.

"The original Hebrew in Zechariah 12:10 reads, look 'unto Me,' or look 'to Me,' (Elai) not 'upon Him' (Ahlav)" (MB, p. 76). This is really only a minor quibble, and hardly delivers Conder from the principal quandary of trying to explain how God could be pierced, yet still deny Jesus as the Messiah, as God come in the flesh, who allowed His creatures to wound Him, then kill Him. Whether it is translated "to Me" or "upon Me" is almost irrelevant. (However, The NIV Exhaustive Concordance lists all the ways the word "el" is translated from Hebrew in the NIV, and while 3052 times it is translated "to," it is translated 114 times "on" and 20 times "upon." Assuming I have the right word here (G/K#448/Strong's#413)--rebuttals by the knowledgeable are welcome--Conder would have to engage in a much more extensive grammatical argument than citing Gen. 44:20-22 to really carry his point). The reference to "upon Him" makes no sense in this context, for the Hebrew word clearly is "Me," not "Him." Conder argues that it is implausible that the narrative would suddenly switch from the first person to the third, from "Me" to "Him." Wheeler maintains otherwise: "It is not uncommon for the grammatical person to change (as from first to third) in the middle of a Hebrew narrative (especially when referring to God)."<sup>121</sup> The NASB rendering found above of the crucial part of Zech. 12:10 is quite literal, which can be verified by Green's Interlinear Bible, which has underneath the Hebrew words, "And they shall look on Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him." Conder cites two Jewish translations which certainly seem to obscure deliberately the crucial part of the verse. The Holy Scriptures has "and they shall look unto Me because they have thrust him through," while the Tanakh loosely paraphrases "and they shall lament to Me about those who are slain." Conder wants to say the slain are the "Him" in question, but since the slain are many, a plural, and "Him" is a singular, this nonsense need not detain us any further. While it is quite true this prophecy is set in the far future, after Christ's Second Coming in verses 8-9, this doesn't mean the piercing had to occur then. After all, it reads "have pierced," but that "they shall mourn for Him." (The complexities of trying to translate Hebrew's "states" into English "tenses" I'm shelving for now). Rather, the Jews are mourning because they have suddenly realized after being given the Holy Spirit that Jesus really was the Jewish Messiah (Heb. 7:14), whom they and their ancestors had denied, that their leadership in 31 A.D. had wrongfully sentenced to death (cf. Matt. 27:25). Nevertheless, even if many of Conder's points about this text were granted, he still hasn't explained how the invincible Yahweh was pierced, which is the main problem for non-Messianic Jews here.

ISAIAH 7:14--DOES IT REFER TO JESUS' BIRTH?

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). In Matthew 1:23, this verse is cited as a prophecy that is fulfilled when Jesus is born. Conder argues that it is hopelessly yanked out of context, being just a sign relevant to King Ahaz in 734 b.c. when Judah was being invaded by Israel and Aram, having nothing to do with the Messiah (see MB, pp. 30-31). The leading problem here is that the secondary meaning of the text isn't obvious. It has a dual meaning, the obvious, primary one being fulfilled in Ahaz's time, and the secondary, antitypical one in Jesus' birth.

According to Smith, the use of the announcement formula "behold!" "signal[s] births of unusual significance," including even in the Ugaritic language, which is highly similar to Hebrew. Much of the controversy surrounding this

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<sup>121</sup>Wheeler, "Letter to Eric Snow," p. 5.

verse concerns how to translate the Hebrew word "almah." It is somewhat ambiguous, and can be translated "virgin" or "young woman." The Septuagint's Jewish translator for this verse may have felt a deeper meaning was here, for he chose the Greek word for virgin, "parthenos," which has to mean a woman without sexual experience. After all, a young woman giving birth is (ahem) the expected, which doesn't make it a very distinctive sign from God--but a virgin giving birth, well, that's at least mighty unusual! The word "almah," always refers to (when the context is clear) an unmarried woman in the nine times it appears in the OT (five times in the plural, four times in the singular). Furthermore, it can mean "virgin," since it is used of Rebekah when she had yet to know a man (Gen. 24:43; cf. 24:16). In the Ugaritic language and Carthagian dialect of Phoenician, the equivalent term for "almah" also means "virgin." Smith reasons thus: If the woman giving birth was unmarried, an illegitimate birth doesn't make for much of a sign from God. So then, the birth had to be by a virgin. Conder then gives us the standard Jewish reply to Christian reasoning on "almah," by saying that if "virgin" had really been intended, Isaiah would have used the word "bethulah." However, this word could refer to an married woman as well. Note Joel 1:8: "Wail like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the bridegroom ['husband'--NKJV] of her youth." While perhaps still somewhat ambiguous, this text still undermines any claim of certainty that "bethulah" must always mean "virgin." Furthermore, in the closely related Aramaic language, the equivalent of "bethulah" is used of a married woman. Conder also argues that the Hebrew word translated "conceived," "harah," in Isa. 7:14 is in the past or perfect tense, and so therefore can't be a prophecy. This argument overlooks the difference between Hebrew, a Semitic language, and English, an Indo-European language, concerning "state" and "tense." In Biblical Hebrew, not modern Israeli Hebrew, "states" are used, not "tenses," such as past, present, and future. As Wheeler explains:

State may be perfect, participle, imperfect or imperative, without regard to the time in which the action occurs (which is generally indicated--if at all--by other aspects of the syntax). In modern Israeli Hebrew, these forms have become past, present, future, and imperative--but if one reads biblical Hebrew like Israeli Hebrew, one stumbles over a great deal. Many Jews make this mistake; so do certain Protestants, and also some in God's church.

Isaiah is evidently using the "prophetic perfect," meaning a special past tense (when it is literally translated into English, as Conder argues for) about, as Smith explains: "future events which are so vivid to their minds and so certain to occur that they can be described as having already occurred." So for Conder to argue that the woman of Isa. 7:14 has already conceived (past tense), and then insist that this text couldn't refer to the future, is really unconvincing, and betrays a lack of knowledge of Hebrew grammar. Scholar Milton Terry understandably speaks of Isaiah 7:14 as "probably the most difficult of all Messianic prophecies"!<sup>122</sup> However, despite Conder's attacks on Matthew's citation of it, it's evident that the Hebrew word "almah" can mean virgin, that the perfect (a type of past) tense doesn't

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<sup>122</sup>Rosen, Y'shua, pp. 16-17; Frydland, What the Rabbis Know about the Messiah, p. 41; Smith, Promised Messiah, pp. 252-54, 262, 264; Milton Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1890), as cited by Smith, Promised Messiah, p. 251; Gesenius', p. 634; Wheeler, "Letter to Eric Snow," pp. 3, 4.

mean this prophecy had to occur only while King Ahaz was alive, and that a dual meaning/application of the verse is at work, in which there is an earlier typical fulfillment in Ahaz's time, and a later, antitypical fulfillment in the first century A.D. True, the secondary, antitypical meaning couldn't be known without the inspired NT's author citing it as referring to Jesus' birth.

But this doesn't show this meaning doesn't exist, since (as surveyed above) there is plenty of evidence for belief in the NT as inspired by God, and Jesus' Messiahship as established by His resurrection independently of any potentially ambiguous messianic texts.

ISAIAH 9:6--THE MESSIAH IS BORN AND CALLED "MIGHTY GOD"

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father [or better, 'Father of Eternity'--EVS], Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this (Isa. 9:6-7).

Conder argues that this text is in the past tense ("is born," "is given," "is called," etc.) and so couldn't refer to a future Messiah: "Again, the translations of the Christian Bibles have rendered this as a future event to support their contention that it was a messianic prophecy about Jesus, which, they claim, is further proven by the titles found in the Scripture" (MB, pp. 85). In fact, this argument is mortally wounded once the reality sinks in that Biblical Hebrew deals with "states," not "tense." As Jehovah's Witnesses explain:

Verbs in English are viewed particularly from the standpoint of tense or time: past, present, future. In Hebrew, however, the condition of the action, rather than the time involved, is the important thing. The action is viewed either as complete or incomplete. If the verb portrays completed action, it is in the perfect state. . . . If the action is viewed as incomplete, the verb is in the imperfect state. This can be illustrated by Exodus 15:1: "Moses and the sons of Israel proceeded to sing." Here we see that while the action had started (they "proceeded" to sing), it had not terminated and was thus "imperfect," unfinished. . . . Ka THaV also may be rendered as "has written" (2 Chron. 26:22)--what would be called the present perfect in English. "Must write" is also used to translate this perfect-state verb and shows the certainty of the [sic?] action's being carried out. (Num. 5:23; Deut. 17:18) Both of these latter renderings correctly imply completed action, but not in past time. So, the active verb of itself does not necessarily convey a concept of time. The perfect state can portray action as completed at any period of time, past, present or future; contrastingly, the imperfect, while also able to show action at any time period, always views it as incomplete.

In the last part of verse 7, according to Green's Interlinear Bible, a future tense (in English) is used, even under the Hebrew words themselves: "The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will do this." Even the first Jewish translation Conder cites, the Tanakh, concurs with this tense. So now--was this son already

born, called these names, and sitting on the throne of Israel? Obviously not--or else the promise of v. 7 that these things will occur due to God's power contradicts how these things supposedly did occur already in v. 6! Furthermore, the grammatical problems only increase for Conder's analysis, as Wheeler explains:

Isaiah 9:6 does not deal in "tense" of any sort. The word yulad (following SHV's transliteration)--in the KJV, "is born"--is in imperfect state; nitan--in the KJV, "is given"--is in perfect state. Were one to read this like Israeli Hebrew, one would have future and past tense, respectively--and that makes no sense. No, the prophecy looks back at Messiah's birth from the viewpoint of the time at the beginning of the Millennium, without indicating that Messiah was to be born immediately before that time.<sup>123</sup>

So when Conder mistakenly says Isa. 9:5-6 has already occurred as "proven" by its past tense, he is simply ignoring some fundamental aspects of Hebrew grammar. After all, wasn't this text a prophecy about the future?

Was there any human king of Israel ever called by these titles/names which were given to this Child? Conder claims that the child born here was Hezekiah (MB, p. 85). While Hezekiah was a good king, "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" he was not. Furthermore, RASHI, the eleventh-century rabbi and Bible commentator, said the child of this verse couldn't be Hezekiah because: "if you count up the years of Hezekiah you will find that Hezekiah was born nine years before his father [Ahaz] ascended the throne." Then, v. 7 says the reign of this King will be "forevermore," which certainly didn't fit Hezekiah's reign, or that of any other human king. To parry this, Conder correctly maintains that the Hebrew word translated "forevermore," olam, need not always mean something totally without end. But this argument ignores the classic refrain pattern of Hebrew poetry, in which the same basic thought is repeated in different words twice in succession. In v. 7, first it says, "There will be no end," and then it says, "From then on and forevermore." The repetition reinforces the idea the normal meaning of olam should apply, especially with the clarification in the first part of the verse, "There will be no end." This text obviously poses major problems to the non-Messianic Jewish viewpoint, so the two Jewish translations Conder cites attempt to obscure this prophecy. The Tanakh transmogrifies the titles "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God," into "The Mighty God is planning grace"--huh? Then The Holy Scriptures transliterates all four titles into a long proper name: "and his name is called Pelejoezelgibbor Abiadsarashalom." Certainly, neither of these operations appear honest on their face. They are both trying to deny that the Child is called GOD. Wheeler condemns the approach that The Holy Scriptures's translators used on this text: "It is wrong for certain Jewish commentaries to run together the Hebrew words behind 'Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace.' Judaism's own interpretation of the accents denies this, as does naturally the original meaning of that notation (in both cases, punctuated as above)."<sup>124</sup> Clearly, when all is considered, this OT text may be the hardest for a Jew

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<sup>123</sup>Aid to Bible Understanding, p. 741; Wheeler, "Letter to Eric Snow," p. 4.

<sup>124</sup>RASHI as cited by Frydland, What the Rabbis Know about the Messiah, p. 40; Wheeler, "Letter to Eric Snow," p. 5.

denying Jesus is the Messiah to explain away, for a literal translation is plainly calling some human child "Mighty God," i.e., God incarnate.<sup>125</sup>

JUST WHO IS THE "SERVANT" IN ISAIAH? JESUS OR ISRAEL?

Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12 contain what have come to be called the four "Servant Songs." When interpreting these texts, the basic issue concerns whether they describe the nation of Israel, Jesus as the Messiah, or someone else. Conder, of course, follows the majority Jewish view of the present time, and maintains they refer to the nation of Israel, and especially to Judah for the climatic fourth Servant Song.

First of all, this prophecy of Isaiah [ch. 42] is not speaking about the Messiah! Nowhere in the Hebrew Scriptures is the Messiah directly called a servant! . . . IN BOTH PASSAGES [Isaiah 42:1-4 and 41:8-9] THE SERVANT IS ISRAEL, conceived in terms of its ideal destiny. . . . the servant "cut off out of the land of the living" is Judah. . . . Again, if Isaiah 52-53 is an analogy of Israel, then it does not apply to Jesus, which so many [liberal!--EVS] commentaries are forced to note (MB, pp. 95, 100, 101).

Such a narrow interpretation doesn't reckon with the evident double meaning involved. (This is especially evident in the second Servant Song--Isa. 49:1-6). True, you can turn back to Isaiah 41:8-9, and find Israel called a "servant." But can you then apply this interpretation uncritically to all four of the Servant Songs, especially Isaiah 52:13-53:12? One source of ambiguity here is a principle long familiar to members of the Church of God about interpreting prophecy: A king and his kingdom are interchangeable. For example, in Daniel 7 four gentile kingdoms are represented by wild beasts: Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. In Dan. 7:17, it reads: "These great beasts, which are four in number, are four kings who will arise from the earth." But then, the fourth king is called a "kingdom" in v. 23: "Thus he said: 'The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the other kingdoms, and it will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it.'" Since a king stands for and governs over the realm he rules, it's understandable why Daniel could treat the two as interchangeable. Similarly, Jesus called Himself the kingdom of God, which was one way how it was "at hand" as well (Mark 1:15). Note Luke 17:20-21: "Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or, "There it is!" For behold, the kingdom of God is [present tense] in your midst.'" Since Jesus is the king of the kingdom of God, it was not in the hearts of the Pharisees, nor the church (which was yet to be established). Instead, it was already present before them, in the form of its king. E.J. Young saw the dual meaning in the Servant Songs, and explained it thus: "The servant is the

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<sup>125</sup>Conder argues that Isa. 9:1-2 have been taken out of context as references to the Messiah (MB, pp. 39-40). This claim discounts how (along with verses 3-4), they are a "warm up" to verses 5-6. As Smith explains it: "Two points are emphasized in this famous prophecy: (1) the promise of a new day (vv. 1-5); and (2) the reason for the new day (vv. 6-7)." Promised Messiah, p. 261. Smith's translation of Isa. 9:1-7 is very striking, which notes a number of "prophetic perfects" put into the English future tense.

Messiah (Jesus Christ) conceived as the Head of His people, the Church (or redeemed Israel). At one time the body is more prominent, at another (e.g., chap. 53) the Head." Hence, while you can read through the Servant Songs, and find ways to apply them to the nation of Israel, this eventually becomes very problematic when facing the fourth Servant Song, where Israel and the Servant are clearly differentiated. Even in the second Servant Song, the difference between the two is evident. On the one hand, Isa. 49:3 states that the Servant is Israel: "And He said to Me, "You are My Servant, Israel, in Whom I will show My glory." Yet, the Servant suddenly becomes the One to lead Israel back to God in v. 5: "And now says the Lord, who formed Me from the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, in order that Israel might be gathered to Him." Obviously, Israel can't be the one leading Israel back to God! Someone Else has to be doing it. Then note how similar part of the first Servant Song (Isa. 42:7) is to Isa. 61:1, which Jesus quoted in Luke 4:18. While Conder denies that the Messiah is ever called a servant, this claim ignores how Isa. 61:1 says the Eternal "has anointed me,"--and the meaning of the word "messiah" is "the anointed one"! It is perfectly reasonable to read Isa. 61:1 back to Isa. 42:7, and then see the Servant as the Messiah, by following the principle of letting the Bible interpret itself.

At least one ancient Jewish commentary, the Midrash Rabbah, Lamentations 3:49-50, 59, interpreted Isa. 61:1 as referring to the Redeemer. Then the highly individualistic language of the Servant Songs, while it can always be seen as parabolic, symbolic, etc. to evade any identification with an individual, still more naturally, more literally would apply to some one human. Even the Jews themselves sometimes have interpreted Isa. 42 as referring to the Messiah. Rabbi David Kimchi explained this scripture thus: "Behold my Servant. . . . This is King Messiah . . . . I have put my Spirit . . . . refers to what is said of Him, 'And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him' (Isaiah 11:2)." The commentaries Mesudat David and Metsudat Zion also maintain this chapter refers to the Messiah. One targum (a Jewish paraphrase of the OT) reads thus: "Behold my Servant, the Messiah, I will draw Him near, my chosen one in whom my Memra [Logos] is well pleased."<sup>126</sup> So, let's turn to the climatic fourth Servant Song, and see if Conder's analysis that the Servant refers to Israel (or Judah) stands up to scrutiny.

#### THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF ISAIAH 52-53 POINTS TO AN INDIVIDUAL, NOT ISRAEL

Undeniably, the most specific prophecy of Jesus' first coming is Isaiah 52:13-53:12. This passage describes the "Mournful Messiah" who died for the sins of others in a vicarious, substitutionary atonement. Quoting the whole passage is superfluous for those with Bibles, but let's notice in particular Isa. 53:4-5, 10, 11:

Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

But He was pierced through for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him . . . . But the Eternal was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering. . . . My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities.

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<sup>126</sup>Frydland, What the Rabbis Know about the Messiah, pp. 52, 55.



Notice that the Servant does not just suffer because of others directly attacking or injuring Him (v. 7), but He takes on their sins and bears them in their place. This is why the sufferings of Judah during the Holocaust (for example) can't be made to fit this passage. No human who isn't God can bear someone else's sins, as the Suffering Servant does (v. 6): "But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." Similarly, the agonies Judah has suffered through the centuries don't fit v. 10: "But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering." Just as an animal sacrificed in a guilt offering bore symbolically the sin of the individual human in question, although it (the animal) had done nothing wrong, so does the Suffering Servant, who (v. 8) "had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth," yet He died for others. Judah has not been a "guilt offering" that bore the sins of the world--but Jesus did. Furthermore, saying Judah (or Israel) has never engaged in violence or deceit is absurd, for all men have sinned--besides Jesus. Conder implausibly applies v. 7 to Judah as a tribe: "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth." It may be true that during the Holocaust few Jews fought against their oppressors--though the Warsaw uprising of 1943 and the mass escape from the Sobibor camp show even then the Jews weren't entirely "silent." But this is only one part of their history, as Frydland reminds us. It discounts the Maccabean Wars of the second century b.c. against the Greeks and the two major Judean revolts against Rome (66-70 A.D., 132-135 A.D.). Nor could Israel be called "silent" concerning the Babylonian exile and the Assyrian invasions. Nor does it fit the history of modern Israel since 1948, which has fought five wars against the Arabs (including the Lebanese invasion). Then, note that the language of Isa. 52:13-53:12 is very personal and singular in its references to the Servant by its use of "he," "him," etc. Verse 3 says: "He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face . . ." Such language it should be taken literally, unless strong compelling evidence indicates it is symbolic--and no such evidence is at hand in the two chapters. Very importantly, the Servant is distinguished from Israel when Isaiah writes that the "ALL of US like sheep have gone astray, each of US has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of US all to fall on HIM" (verse 6; cf. verses 4-5). Now who could be the "US" other than Isaiah's nation, which then is clearly distinguished from the Servant? Then notice this (v. 8): "HE was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of MY PEOPLE to whom the stroke was due." HOW CAN ANYONE HONESTLY SAY THE SERVANT AND ISRAEL ARE ONE AND THE SAME WHEN FACING THIS VERSE?<sup>127</sup> No other passage in the Hebrew Bible, other than perhaps the seventy weeks prophecy, more strongly challenges the orthodox Jewish

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<sup>127</sup>Conder attempts to evade the whole passage by saying Jesus' death doesn't fit part of v. 10: "He will see His offspring." While it's true Jesus had no physical offspring, he certainly did have spiritual offspring. Note John 1:12-13: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born [begotten, margin] not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." "He will prolong His days" (v. 10) after being "cut off out of the land of the living" (v. 8) through His resurrection from the dead. Otherwise, these two texts could easily be seen as contradictory. Conder's comment that "The prophecies of Isaiah are not, to put it bluntly, prophecies of Jesus unless he was to have children and live to a ripe old age!" certainly doesn't resolve this otherwise implicit contradiction (MB, p. 100).

viewpoint, which generally wishes to eliminate the Mournful Messiah, and emphasize the Conquering Messiah.<sup>128</sup>

Conder does cite a liberal Catholic commentary, The Collegeville Bible Commentary, to buttress his interpretation of the passage. But it has to be realized that theological liberals deny the validity of any predictive prophecy as having been fulfilled, which is undoubtedly why they place the book of Daniel as having been written in or completed by the second century b.c. They have an in-built prejudice to back-date all books of the Bible that have successfully predicted the future to a later date, so they can be historical (after-the-fact) writings instead. Similarly, they can't believe any OT prophecy written hundreds of years in advance could possibly refer to Jesus of Nazareth, so they interpret them in a manner to deny the obvious application to Him. So when citing such a work, would Conder accept their (likely) interpretation of the classic OT prophecies used by (say) Josh McDowell to prove the OT is inspired by God? Would he accept how they would (presumably) interpret Gen. 1-11 in order to make it conform with the theory of evolution and uniformitarian (gradual change) geology, such as by denying the days of Gen. 1 are literal and that the Deluge was worldwide? The same anti-supernaturalistic premises are operating in both cases, and it's hard to employ them on Isaiah 52-53 or any other messianic text in order to refute Christianity, but then to deny their application in (say) Genesis.

Nowadays Jews normally maintain that Isaiah 52-53 speaks of Israel; Unsurprisingly, Conder has followed their lead. But this view didn't become widespread among them until the thirteenth century A.D., especially because of the influence of the rabbi called RASHI (1040-1105 A.D.). Anciently, various Jewish writings attest that at least some Jews saw Isaiah 52 and/or 53 as messianic texts. For example, the targum Jonathan, which was written in the early second century A.D. proves this. It paraphrases for Isa. 52:13: "Behold, My servant the Messiah shall prosper; he shall be exalted and great and very powerful." Other rabbis interpreted this passage similarly. Concerning the Servant in these two chapters, the famous rabbinic scholar of the sixteenth century, Rabbi Moshe Alshekh, maintained: "[Our] Rabbis with one voice, accept and affirm that opinion that the prophet [Isaiah] is speaking of king Messiah." While this claim is exaggerated, it still had some foundation, especially in so far as the last three verses of Isaiah 52 are considered. The Targum interprets Isaiah 52:13: "Behold my Servant the Messiah shall prosper." As for Isaiah 53, the Talmud, the collection of Jewish law and tradition completed by the fifth century A.D., applies this passage variously. But in at least one case the Talmud applied it directly to the Messiah. In Sanhedrin 98a it says: "The Rabanan (rabbis) say the Messiah's name is The Suffering Scholar of Rabbi's House [or The Leper Scholar] for it is written 'Surely He hath borne our grief and carried our sorrows, yet we esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted.'" The Midrash (ancient Jewish commentary) Rabbah Ruth v. 6 applied the text "He was wounded for our afflictions" to the Messiah, and it was not alone in doing this. None other than Moses Maimonides (1135-1204 A.D.), the great medieval Jewish philosopher, rejected RASHI's interpretation, and said Isa. 53 referred

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<sup>128</sup>On the subject of Isa. 52-53 generally, see Frydland, What the Rabbis Know about the Messiah, pp. 69-72; Rosen, Y'shua, pp. 58-65; Smith, Promised Messiah, pp. 306-18. That Jews were not exactly "silent" under Roman rule is shown by one chapter in: Anthony A. Barrett, Caligula: The Corruption of Power (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 182-91.

to the Messiah.<sup>129</sup> When carefully examined, calling this section of Isaiah a parabolic description of Israel simply isn't persuasive.

#### THE MOURNFUL AND CONQUERING MESSIAHS: IS THE OT SELF-CONTRADICTIONARY?

Conder, like most Jews of early first-century Judea, conceives of the Messiah as a conqueror who establishes the kingdom of God when he comes. He totally dismisses the ideas of a "Mournful Messiah" or "Suffering Servant" who came to serve God and die: "Unfortunately--for Christianity--the Scriptures that are so freely used as proof of Jesus' Messiahship, also clearly speak of ONLY ONE COMING FOR ISRAEL'S MESSIAH WHICH OCCURS IN THE END TIME! . . . And that book [the OT] will not tell us about two comings of the Messiah or make him out to be a deity!" (MB, pp. 88, 95). Nowadays, Jews generally say that the Messiah has only one coming in which He is a Conqueror waging war against the nations. Its biggest problem comes from trying to reconcile all the texts on the Messiah to fit it. For example, consider these two texts, both of which the Jews have seen as applying to the Messiah. First, note Zech. 9:9: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Then consider Dan. 7:13-14:

I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion [cf. Isa. 9:7] which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.

Both of these texts describe the Messiah, yet He comes in two very different ways! How could you reconcile them? Without positing two comings for the Messiah, it's nearly impossible! To explain this discrepancy, Jews have resorted to even saying the donkey was a miraculous one (!), or saying if Israel was worthy, the Messiah would come one way, if not, the other. In the Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98a, one rabbi explained it thus:

R. Alexandri said that R. Joshua bar Levi combined the two paradoxical passages; the one that says, 'Behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven' (Dan. 7:13) [showing Messiah's glory] and the other verse that says, 'poor and riding upon a donkey' (Zech. 9:9) [showing Messiah's humility]. He explained it in this manner: If they are worthy, He will come 'with the clouds of heaven;' if they are unworthy He will come 'poor and riding upon a donkey.'

The Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 52b, proposed another solution: There would be two Messiahs. One is called Messiah ben Joseph, who, as Frydland summarizes, "fights, suffers extreme humiliation, and is pierced, fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy, 'They shall look unto Me whom they have pierced.'" The other was Messiah Ben David, who would be given the nations as an inheritance (Ps. 2:8). Later rabbinic sources portrayed the two thus, as Frydland summarizes the work

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<sup>129</sup>Rosen, Y'shua, p. 75; Frydland, What the Rabbis Know about the Messiah, pp. 53-56; McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 307

of Waxman: "Messiah Ben Joseph will be pierced through by Armilus, after which there will be much tribulation. Then, the Messiah, called Menachem Ben Ami-El, appears to the remnant of Israel. He, together with Elijah, brings to life Messiah Ben Joseph, and then the rest of the dead." Conder and modern Jews may discount or ignore the differing descriptions of the Messiah in the OT. But anciently at least some did not, which shows interpreting the OT to say the Messiah would only come back as a Conqueror disagrees even with how many of the Jews themselves understood it!<sup>130</sup> The Christian solution, of saying the same Messiah has two widely separated visits to earth, solves this apparent OT contradiction. Now, how does Conder propose to solve it, using the OT alone?

#### WHEN WAS THE MESSIAH TO COME? THE POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF GENESIS 49:10

When Jacob (not Abraham) was on his deathbed, he prophesied of Judah: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes" (Gen. 49:10). The main dispute surrounding this verse is how to translate and interpret the last clause. Anciently, Jews have seen this as a title of the Messiah. For example, the Targum Onkelos (second century A.D.) says for this verse: "The transmission of dominion shall not cease from the house of Judah, nor the scribe from his children's children, forever, until the Messiah comes, to whom the Kingdom belongs, and whom the nations shall obey." The Targum Yerushalmi (sixth century A.D., but based on earlier sources) reads: "Kings shall not cease from the house of Judah, nor scribes who teach the Torah from his children's children, until the time of the coming of the King Messiah, to whom belongs the Kingdom, and to whom all dominions of the earth shall become subservient." In the Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98b, one rabbi asked what was the Messiah's name: "R. Johanan said: [The world was created] For the sake of the Messiah. What is his (the Messiah's) name?--The School of R. Shila said: His name is Shiloh, for it is written: Until Shiloh come. The Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (late seventh century A.D., but based on earlier sources) states: "Kings and rulers shall not cease from the house of Judah, nor scribes who teach the Torah from his seed, until the time when the King Messiah shall come, the youngest of his sons, and because of him nations shall melt away."<sup>131</sup> Conder cites the Tanakh and The Holy Scriptures translations to justify evading this text, in which the translators understand the words "until Shiloh come" to mean instead, "So that tribute shall come." The marginal note of the Tanakh on this translation says: "Shiloh, understood as shailoh 'tribute to him, following Midrash; cf. Isa. 18:7. Mean of Heb. uncertain; lit. 'Until he comes to Shiloh.'" (see MB, p. 156). Ironically for these translators, at least two Midrashim (ancient Jewish OT commentaries) do mention this interpretation of this verse. Midrash Rabbah Genesis, "Some interpret it [Gen. 49:9] to mean, 'He couched;' that is, He waited from Zedekiah until King Messiah." The Midrash Tanhuma interprets the scepter to mean the throne, and that "'The lawgiver from between his feet . . . refers to the time when the King will come to whom belongs the Kingdom." The Yalkut, a medieval Jewish anthology, said the word "Shiloh" meant "gift to the Lord," yet still attributed this prophecy to the

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<sup>130</sup>Frydland, What the Rabbis Know about the Messiah, pp. 5, 60; cf. Raphael Patai as cited in Rosen, Y'shua, pp. 73-74; Robert C. Newman, "The Testimony of Messianic Prophecy," in John Warwick Montgomery, ed., Evidence for Faith: Deciding the God Question (Dallas: Probe Books, 1991), p. 206.

<sup>131</sup>as cited in Rosen, Y'shua, pp. 71-72.

Messiah.<sup>132</sup> Evidently, contemporary Jewish translators find this text to be troublesome to their faith, so they deliberately misread what appears to be a proper name ("Shiloh") as another word, "tribute."

Now, it's all fine and good to show many Jews in the past interpreted Gen. 49:10 to refer to the Messiah, but how about a more direct argument, based on the Bible interpreting itself? Consider Ezekiel 21:27, which refers to the removal of the scepter (throne) from Judah to Israel, as HWA understood it: "A ruin, a ruin, a ruin, I shall make it. This also will be no more, until He comes whose right it is; and I shall give it to Him." Frydland says that the Hebrew word for "whose right it is" is asher-lo, "which is basically the same word used in the scepter prophecy for 'Shiloh.'" The two passages correspond with one another, since in Eze. 21:27 the throne of Judah is really the Messiah's, which He will take back when He comes to rule the nations. Smith maintains that seeing "Shiloh" as a title for the Messiah is the most likely meaning, arguing that changing the text so it reads "which is to him" or "which belongs to him" is unjustified. To do this means admitting a transcriptional error has occurred, which creates the peculiar grammatical problem of "shiloh" then becoming a "combination of a relative pronoun, a preposition, and a pronominal suffix." If it is interpreted to mean "until he (Judah) comes to Shiloh," then it would mean that Judah received "the obedience of the peoples." The history of the Jews since the end of monarchy among them hardly fits that description. The revolt of the northern kingdom against Judah that established the divided monarchy shows the Jews didn't receive obedience even from the other tribes, let alone the nations at large.

So if Shiloh does refer to the Messiah, then it can help us place when the Messiah had to come. The Messiah has to arrive before monarchy ends among the Jews: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah . . . until Shiloh comes." Now while the Davidic monarchy ended among the Jews when Zedekiah was taken into captivity in 587 b.c., there were rulers after it with the title, "the king of the Jews." The Hasmoneans, better known as the Maccabees, took the title "the king of the Jews" from 103 b.c. to 63 b.c. Herod the Great, while an Edomite, did have some Jewish blood in his veins according to his biographer [though this may not be true], ruled from 40 b.c. to 4 b.c. His grandson Herod Agrippa I, descended from the Hasmoneans as well, had the same title and ruled from 41 to 44 A.D. No one since has had that title and been the king over the Jews. While HWA interpreted this prophecy to apply to the Second Coming, there's also reason to apply it the first as well, when following the principle of duality in fulfillment/interpretation. As Newman then deduces, "If Genesis 49:10 is understood in this sense, the Messiah must have come before A.D. 44."<sup>133</sup> Another approach to dating when the ruler's staff/scepter departed from Judah concerns when Jewish leaders could no longer inflict the death penalty independently of Rome, a matter especially relevant to the events surrounding Jesus' trial. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote that: "The Romans reserved to themselves the right of the sword, and neglected all else." When they grabbed this power away from the Sanhedrin in

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<sup>132</sup>Frydland, What the Rabbis Know about the Messiah, pp. 17.

<sup>133</sup>Frydland, What the Rabbis Know about the Messiah, pp. 16; Smith, Promised Messiah, pp. 57-58; Newman in Montgomery, Evidence for Faith, p. 209; See HWA's comments in The United States and Britain in Prophecy (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1980), pp. 58. After all, transferring the throne to Joseph from Judah means the scepter did depart from Judah, at least when narrowly defined to refer only to the Davidic line.

Judea has been disputed. Evidently according to Magath, after Herod's son Archelaus was disposed in 11 A.D., the procurators of Rome took the Sanhedrin's power to inflict the death penalty away. Even the Talmud (Jerusalem, Sanhedrin, fol. 24, recto.) asserts it was lost "a little more than forty years before the destruction of the Temple." Interestingly, the Jews lamented the loss of this power thus:

Rabbi Rachmon says, "When the members of the Sanhedrin found themselves deprived of their right over life and death, a general consternation took possession of them; they covered their heads with ashes, and their bodies with sackcloth, exclaiming: 'Woe unto us, for the scepter has departed from Judah, and the Messiah has not come!'"

Consider the ominous implications of the Jews themselves having once interpreted Gen. 49:10 this way for claims that the Messiah is yet to come!<sup>134</sup>

Therefore, two comings of the Messiah are necessary to explain all the OT texts referring to Him, since the Conquering Messiah hasn't arrived, yet the scepter did depart from Judah if interpreted in either of these ways.

WAS THE SECOND TEMPLE TO BE STANDING WHEN THE MESSIAH CAME?

Another worthwhile line of reasoning for dating the Messiah's arrival concerns whether the Second Temple, rebuilt after the Babylonian captivity had ended, of Zerubbabel (c. 515 b.c.) and Herod (beginning 19 b.c.), had to be standing when He came. While the Second Temple was being initially rebuilt under Zerubbabel, the prophet Haggai predicted: "And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of Host" (Haggai 2:7, KJV). Now, how was the glory of the second temple greater than the first? The word translated "glory" can refer to physical wealth or to God's presence. True, if it refers to the former, then arguably under Herod the Second Temple eventually exceeded the First of Solomon, by becoming one of the ancient world's real architectural marvels. But if it refers to the latter, which certainly makes more sense (cf. I Kings 8:10-11), this could only be fulfilled by Jesus, God in the flesh, arriving at the Temple. Why? Because the Second Temple never had the personal presence of God in the form of the Shekinah in it, nor did it have the Ark of the Covenant.<sup>135</sup> Instead, Mal. 3:1 was fulfilled in Christ: "Behold, I am going to send My messenger [John the Baptist--Matt. 11:9-11], and he will clear the way before Me [the Eternal]. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple [Luke 2:26-27, 32, 46-49; John 2:13-21--this could also refer to a possible temple yet to be built--EVS]; and the messenger of the [new] covenant, in whom you delight, He is coming." With the Second Temple's destruction in 70 A.D., the Messiah had to arrive before then

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<sup>134</sup>See McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, pp. 168-70.

<sup>135</sup>Interestingly, God increasingly withdrew what presence from the Second Temple during the forty years before its destruction, according to the Jews themselves. "The lot for the goat to be sacrificed ceased to come up on the right hand of the High Priest as previously; the crimson cloth they put out on Yom Kippur would not turn white as it had before; the Western light would not keep burning as before; and the doors of the Temple would no longer open of themselves" (Frydland, What the Rabbis Know about the Messiah, pp. 18-19; citing Rosh Hashanah 31b and Yoma 39b).

in order for its glory to exceed the First Temple's. After all, when else could have the 30 pieces of silver, "that magnificent price at which I [Yahweh] was valued by them," been thrown to the potter in the House of the Lord? (Zech. 11:13). Certainly, this can't occur to the Conquering Messiah!

It's quite true that there's been a lot of controversy over how to translate the underlined phrase in Hag. 2:7, because the Hebrew word for "desire of," chemdat is a singular, while the verb is plural, "they shall come." Cases of this occur in Amos 6:1 ("house of Israel" and "they shall come") and Haggai 1:2 ("people" and "they said"). Taking chemdat collectively, as most modern commentators do, runs into the problem that there are no cases of this in the OT. (Gesenius-Kautzsch insist on emending the noun chemdat into a plural. This would be a curious proposal if it could be understood as a collective noun, similar to how HWA understood "Elohim," the Hebrew word for "God.") In I Samuel 9:20, though other translations exist, the desire (chemdat) of Israel was focused on Saul to save them from their enemies as a king: "And to whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not to you and to all the house of your father?" (Green's Literal Translation). So while there is legitimate ambiguity in how to translate Hag. 2:7, a good case can be made for the ancient Jewish interpretation that saw this as a personal reference to the Messiah, which then likely means the Messiah had to come before the Second Temple's destruction.<sup>136</sup>

#### THE SEVENTY WEEKS PROPHECY SHOWS THE MESSIAH CAME BY THE FIRST CENTURY

The Seventy Weeks prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 is surely the most powerful proof that the Messiah had to come by the first century.

Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place. So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifices and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.

Admittedly, several schools of how to exactly interpret this prophecy flourish, since it is difficult to interpret with full certainty. Note it says the Messiah will be "cut off," i.e., killed, in v. 26. This certainly can't be a reference to the Conquering Messiah, which conclusively proves the Messiah will have two comings! However, regardless of almost any mental somersaults anyone applies to this prophecy, besides totally allegorizing it,

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<sup>136</sup>Smith, Promised Messiah, pp. 398-406, 408-10; Newman in Montgomery, ed., Evidence for Faith, pp. 209-10; McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, vol. 1, p. 170; Frydland, What the Rabbis Know about the Messiah, p. 76.

it points to the Messiah arriving by 100 A.D. By applying the Old Testament's day-for-a-year principle (Num. 14:33-34; Eze. 4:4-6), the 7 weeks and the 62 weeks amount to 483 years (v. 25) "from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince." Counting 483 years from the time king Artaxerxes of Persia issued a decree (457 b.c.), while skipping the year "0" since there was no such thing, comes out to A.D. 27. This last year was the first year of Jesus' public ministry, since He was crucified in A.D. 31 after a ministry of three and a half years. Newman counts up 69 seven-year land sabbatical cycles, which concern the years Israel was to let farmland lie fallow. When using the starting point of 445 b.c., this yields the similar result of 28-35 A.D. for sixty-ninth cycle. While you can argue and dispute about the exact year of Jesus' birth (such as whether it was 4 b.c. or 2 b.c.) or death (A.D. 30, 31, 33), or which decree by which Persian king to start from (Cyrus, 537 b.c.; Darius, c. 519 b.c.; Artaxerxes, 445 b.c., etc.), the fact remains that Daniel has the Messiah appearing by the first century. To maintain the Messiah is still only in the future, centuries and centuries after the 69 weeks have expired, is simply absurd, when using one part of the Bible to interpret another part by the day-for-a-year principle. True, long-standing running disputes surround whether the seventieth week follows right after the sixty-ninth, or is separate from them, and is fulfilled during the Great Tribulation. But either way this prophecy still points to the Messiah's arrival by the early first century A.D., regardless of any disputes over the precise dating of Christ's birth and the beginning of His ministry. It's hardly all just "guess work"--a couple of disputed years back and forth doesn't solve Conder's fundamental problem with Daniel, which is no doubt why he attacks its historicity nearly as harshly as any book in the NT! (MB, p. 126).<sup>137</sup>

#### THE INSERTED PUNCTUATION IN BIASED JEWISH TRANSLATIONS OF DAN. 9:25

In order to duck this prophecy's implications, Conder uses a biased Jewish translation. It inserts a semi-colon in the middle of v. 25, between the 7 and 62 weeks, to push back the arrival of the Messiah to just 49 years after the decree was issued by the Persian king. How this arose is well explained by Jehovah's Witnesses:

Evidently because of their rejection of Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the Masorettes [the Jewish scribes who added the vowel points to the Hebrew text--EVS] accented the Hebrew text at Daniel 9:25 with an 'athnach', or "stop," after "seven weeks," thereby dividing it off from the "sixty-two weeks"; in this way, the 62 weeks of the prophecy, namely, 434 years, appear to apply to the time of rebuilding ancient Jerusalem.

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<sup>137</sup>On the Seventy Weeks Prophecy, see Rosen, Y'Shua, pp. 37-40; Frydland, What the Rabbis Know about the Messiah, pp. 75-76; Newman in Montgomery, ed., Evidence for Faith, pp. 211-12. For an anti-gap interpretation of it, which I think is the superior version, see Seventh-Day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: An Explanation of Certain Major Aspects of Seventh-Day Adventist Belief (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957), pp. 268-308; Smith, Promised Messiah, pp. 382-396. For a pro-gap interpretation, see McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, pp. 170-75. For the record it should be noted HWA split the different between the two schools, and said the first half occurred during Christ's ministry (27-31 A.D.), but the second half of the seventieth week will happen during the great tribulation yet to come.



Professor E.B. Pusey explains it thus:

The Jews put the main stop of the verse under [the Hebrew word for "seven"], meaning to separate the two numbers, 7 and 62. This they must have done dishonestly . . . as Rashi [the prominent Jewish rabbi and commentator] says in rejecting literal expositions which favoured the Christians 'on account of the heretics,' i.e. Christians.<sup>138</sup>

The Tanakh reads for v. 25: "You must know and understand; from the issuance of the word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the anointed leader [the Messiah] is seven weeks; and for sixty-two weeks it [Jerusalem] will be rebuilt, square and moat, but in a time of distress." This translation creates three major absurdities. First, did the Messiah appear by the fifth century b.c.? If only 49 years elapsed from 457 b.c., He had to arrive by 408 b.c., which is the purest poppycock. Then, second, note what v. 26 says: "And after those sixty-two weeks, the anointed one [Messiah] will disappear and vanish." If the Messiah was cut off after the 62 weeks of years, that would mean He lived on earth for some 434 years before being killed! Third, did it really take 434 years for Jerusalem to be rebuilt? By citing The Jewish Encyclopedia, Conder attempts to turn the Persian king Cyrus into the anointed one (cf. Isa. 45:1), but saying a gentile king could fulfill the promises of v. 24 is simply impossible! (MB, p. 128). Furthermore, he'd still have to live the entire 434 years! Conder cites two liberal commentaries to buttress his views--Peake's and the Collegetown, which merely displays their evident anti-supernaturalistic premises.

#### THE BATTLE BETWEEN TWO SCHOOLS OF PROPHETIC INTERPRETATION OVER DAN. 9:24-27

The last part of Dan. 9:26, which prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. by the Roman legions under Titus, need not be considered as occurring during the 70 weeks of years. As Smith writes, while initially admitting this is the biggest weakness of the traditional view that the seventieth week follows right after the sixty-ninth:

While the implication may be present that the seventy heptads terminate in the destruction of Jerusalem, the passage does not directly affirm such to be the case. The word determined in verse 26-27 may suggest that what would happen during the seventy heptads would seal the fate of Jerusalem, and of the Roman armies which would attack Jerusalem. Taken this way, the passage would not be saying that the desolations would take place during the seventy heptads, but only that they would be determined during that period.

To create confusion, Conder apparently seizes upon the long-running disputes between futurists/dispensationalists who maintain the seventieth week is separate from the other 69 by a large gap, and the traditional historicist view, which maintains the seventieth week occurs right after the first 69 weeks of years. When HWA held that the first 3 1/2 years of the seventieth

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<sup>138</sup>Insight on the Scriptures, vol. 2 (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1988), pp. 902-3. E.B. Pusey, Daniel the Prophet, 1885, p. 190, as cited by Insight on the Scriptures, vol. 2, p. 903.

week followed right after the sixty-ninth week (in 27 A.D. to 31 A.D.), but that the second 3 1/2 years will ensue during the great tribulation, with a gap of some 2000 years in-between, he split the difference between these two rival camps that argue about how to interpret prophecy generally. A major dispute surrounds whether to apply the beginning of v. 27 to the antichrist during the great tribulation to come, as futurists maintain, or to Jesus in the past, in 31 A.D., as historicists like the SDAs do. The futurists' (and Conder's) interpretation is most likely wrong because, as Smith observes, it is unnatural to say the "prince to come" is the subject of v. 27 because "the word occupies only a subordinate position in verse 26 where it is not even the subject of a sentence." Hence, it refers to Jesus who "in the middle of the [seventieth] week . . . put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering" as still being required by God. It then wouldn't refer to the antichrist during the great tribulation who would stop the Jews from offering sacrifices at a Temple yet to be rebuilt in Jerusalem. When v. 26 says "after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing," it doesn't say exactly when after the sixty-two weeks. Verse 27 answers this question, by saying "in the middle of the [next, the seventieth] week," i.e., 31 A.D. While much more could be said on how to interpret this prophecy, it isn't as confusing as Conder makes it, especially when following the SDA/historicist view, which places the seventieth week right after the sixty-ninth.<sup>139</sup>

#### THE CASE FOR JESUS BEING THE MESSIAH SUMMARIZED

While certainly some Old Testament texts, being just types, only suggestively point to Christ as the Messiah, others are much stronger. Psalms 22, since it ostensibly just describes the sufferings of David as a type of Christ's, and doesn't make a specific verbal prediction about the Messiah, can only be seen as suggestive, much like other texts Conder would charge were taken out of context. Still, we have to be wary of imposing our artificial, preconceived standards on the word of God, and think that when the NT's writers cite OT texts as types, they are taking them "out of context." But Conder's problems mount when various texts state or imply that the Messiah is God. "For a child will be born to us . . . His name will be called . . . Mighty God" (Isa. 9:5-6). "They will look on Me [Yahweh] whom they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10). "Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel [God with us]" (Isa. 7:14). "So they weighed out thirty shekels of silver as my wages. Then the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter, that magnificent price at which I [Yahweh] was valued by them" (Zech. 11:12-13). Then there's the evidence that the Messiah has to have two comings, or else the Old Testament is self-contradictory. The Mournful Messiah doesn't make much an entrance: "Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; Humble, and mounted on a donkey" (Zech. 9:9). The Messiah will die: "Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing" (Dan. 9:26). "He was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due?" (Isa. 53:8). The Messiah came to die in order to bear the sins of others, as a substitutionary atonement, which is hardly a idea that

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<sup>139</sup>Curiously, in a footnote, Conder says the 1290 days of Daniel 12:11 were used by William Miller, whose predictions about the end of the world in 1843/44 helped form the SDA church (MB, p. 128). Actually, it was the 2300 days of Dan. 8:14, when interpreted as years and added to 457 b.c., that formed the foundation of the SDA system of prophetic interpretation concerning the sanctuary, the investigative judgment, etc.

originated in paganism: "My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. . . . Because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:11-12). Yet the Conquering Messiah will come in glory, as an invincible Warrior: "Behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him" (Dan. 7:13-14). "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap" (Mal. 4:2). Conder fails to notice how an OT prophet may suddenly leap hundreds of years in the course of a single verse or two. This mistake causes him to apply to the end times prophecies that have already been at least partially fulfilled based on a "package deal" view of lengthy prophecies that can't really admit individual components (verses) are fulfilled at different times. Furthermore, such a text as Dan. 9:24-27, supplemented by texts with less clarity (Hag. 2:7-9; Gen. 49:10), demonstrate that the Messiah had arrive by 100 A.D., regardless of how much anyone may fiddle with Christ's birth date, time of death, which decree by which Persian king to use, etc. If the Messiah has already come once, and clearly He wasn't the Conquering Messiah who came to rule the world, then He had to be the Mournful Messiah, who died for our sins. There's every good reason why the disciples evangelized by make reference to the Suffering Servant, "crushed for our iniquities" (Isa. 53:5), who came to die as the Messiah: "But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled" (Acts 3:17). "[Paul] reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ' (Acts 17:2-3). Paul told King Agrippa: "[I stated] nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He should be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:22-23). So while the types of Christ can only be seen as suggestive, which weren't "taken out of context" because they didn't make specific verbal predictions, the clear and direct messianic texts are quite another matter, which render the Old Testament self-contradictory in any attempt to deny that the Messiah came by the first century.

#### IS THE NEW TESTAMENT ANTI-SEMITIC?

Conder, in a statement that explains the title of his book, and perhaps expresses his overall thesis the most clearly, accuses Christianity of causing anti-Semitism:

Again, what the Christian world has done from the first century until the present is to try to put the blame for the death of Jesus on the heads of the Jews and for a very good reason. The simple but cleverly hidden truth of the matter is that there has been an incredibly involved satanic conspiracy spanning twenty-five hundred years of history to drive the Ten Tribes of Israel as far from the truth of their Creator as possible! The only way to accomplish this was to either destroy or discredit the only people commissioned by the Creator to preserve the truth of the Hebrew faith! Therefore, from the time that Catholicism first produced the stories of Jesus' life, through the so-called "conversion" of

Constantine the Great to Christianity, until the present, the  
villains of Christianity had to be the Jews! (MB, p. 53).

This accusation simply fails to distinguish true Christianity from the false.

While the anti-Semitism of the early Catholics is undeniable, and was, as Bacchiocchi explains in From Sabbath to Sunday, a cause for the abandonment of the Sabbath for Sunday worship, this wasn't true Christianity. After all, if you are following the teachings of Jesus to the letter, you are commanded to love your enemies (Matt. 5:43-48). Jesus prayed while on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). That sure doesn't sound like an attempt to heap blame upon the Jews! If gentile Catholic church fathers wrote the gospels, why didn't they blue pencil this statement by Jesus (John 4:22): "You [Samaritans] worship that which you do not know; we [Jews] worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews." Or consider an incident that cries out for some gentile editing, which is Jesus' exchange with the Canaanite woman of the Tyre/Sidon district. First, after her cry for mercy on her demon-possessed daughter, Jesus ignored her, and "did not answer her a word." He replied to his disciples who told Him to send her away, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel." [cf. Matt. 10:5-6!] Then the gentile comes to Him, and begs for help, and Jesus initially replies to her request: "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Remember, "dog" is a traditional Jewish term of contempt for gentiles, although Jesus softened it by using the Greek word that refers to a family pet. Jesus quite obviously was testing her faith! But with her wise, faithful reply, Jesus responded, and her daughter was healed. (See Matt. 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30). These statements by Jesus are just part of the picture that McDowell and Wilson paint about how the Gospels have a Semitic, not gentile, flavor. Fundamentally, Conder's blaming Christianity for anti-Semitism is an invalid ad hominem argument, which imputes the sins of various individuals who persecuted Jews onto the New Testament, which certainly condemns such immoral behavior. Paul once wrote: "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge . . . Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:17-19, 21). Jesus told His followers to pray for those who persecute them (Matt. 5:44), and to flee to another city when persecuted, and said nothing about striking back (Matt. 10:23). In the light of Conder's attacks, it's necessary to remember that Christianity began as a religion of pacifism, unlike Islam, a religion born of the sword under Muhammad's own direction when struggling with the Meccans who had cast him out. The early Christians refused to serve in the Roman army, and avoided holding political office. There is no record of a Christian serving in the Roman army until the time of Marcus Aurelius (reigned 161-80, including his joint rule with Lucius Verus). In 295, one son of a famous veteran, Maximilian refused to serve in the army. He simply stated the reason why thus: "I am a Christian." Even the likes of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Origen, "early Catholic Church fathers," opposed Christian involvement in war.<sup>140</sup> The political perspective of Paul in Romans 13:1-7 assumes that the state would always be an alien imposition upon Christians, never dreaming they end up running it! A Christian cannot "bear the sword," even in the service of the state, and still be a true follower of Jesus. Jesus told Peter to "Put your

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<sup>140</sup>Make Sure of All Things, pp. 357, 491-92; On the Semitic flavor of the Gospels, the Jewish environment of the NT, and a critique of charges that the NT is anti-Semitic, see McDowell and Wilson, He Walked Among Us, pp. 233-61.

sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52). Jesus said that if his kingdom was of this world, "My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews," but since it wasn't, they weren't (John 18:36). Hence, if true Christianity is a religion of pacifism, then Jesus' true followers would never use violence, whether privately or through the power of the state, to persecute Jews or those of any other religion. You have to distinguish the misguided, sinful acts of many, many individual Christians down through the centuries from what Jesus Himself would have done. As the Jewish writers of The Yeshua Challenge explain:

For example, can we truly blame our sufferings on Jesus and the things he taught? Can those who have wrongly used the name of Jesus make it wrong for us to believe and trust in him? Can the evil committed in Y'shua's name free us from the responsibility of considering his true identity? These are important questions, because if the answer is no and we continue to allow anti-Semitism to prevent us from considering Jesus, we allow anti-Semites to keep us in the dark about the greatest Jew who ever lived--which produces an even great injustice against us. It is important to remember that Jesus never taught hatred of Jewish people, nor did that hatred begin with the church. Persecution was a fact of Jewish existence in the days of Pharaoh and Haman. [The history of Rome, especially with the anti-Semitism touched off by the Jewish revolt of 132-35 A.D., shows pagan anti-Semitism is more dangerous than the (ahem) "Christian" variety. The Jewish ghetto of Rome was the only major one never assaulted by Catholics in Europe during the Middle Ages--the seat of the Vatican! Nazism can be seen to be in the same category, i.e., a pagan type--EVS].  
. . . Jesus and his teachings have no connection to crimes committed in his name.<sup>141</sup>

#### THE PROBLEMS WITH THE CONDER THESIS SUMMARIZED

Above, in a preliminary form, the Conder thesis against Christianity was examined, and it has been found wanting. While Conder claims "probably seventy-five percent of what I've written is beyond question," this essay, and the sources it is based upon, demonstrate that all his primary assertions are wrong: In fact, the New Testament is historically reliable, first-century Christianity was not directly dependent on pagan religions or philosophy for its doctrinal content, and the messianic prophecies do point to someone, a Mournful Messiah, fulfilling them in the first century by the name of Jesus of Nazareth. The evidence for the truth of Christianity has only been rather briefly surveyed above, as long as this essay is. It is astonishingly short-sighted for anyone to read Conder's work, and think it's the final word on the subject without also investigating the evidence for the other side. "The first to plead his case seems just, until another comes and examines him" (Prov. 18:17). It's originality chiefly consists in employing the old arguments of higher critic scholarship in the service of Judaism instead of atheism, agnosticism, deism, or some other brand of infidelity. After all, did we not have an emotional conviction that Jesus was our Savior, and that He

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<sup>141</sup>Eliyah Gould, Rich Robinson, and Ruth Rosen, compilers, The Yeshua Challenge: Answers for those who say Jews can't believe in Jesus, part 1 (San Francisco, CA: Purple Pomegranate Productions, 1993), pp. 19-20.

lives in us now? How can we reject Him so casually, unless we never really knew Him to begin with? How can you pray without having Jesus as your intercessor with the Father? How are you forgiven for your sins according to the Old Testament alone, if Jesus' sacrifice didn't do it? May we remember that Jesus is the Messiah, that those who deny Him as Savior cannot be saved (Matt. 10:33): "But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven."

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This research taken from the Web at: <http://www.biblestudy.org>

#### FOR FURTHER READING

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#### FOR MORE ON THE MESSIANIC PROPHECIES:

Rachmiel Frydland, What the Rabbis Know about the Messiah (Cincinnati, OH: Messianic Publishing Co., 1993). Moishe Rosen, Y'shua: The Jewish Way to Say Jesus (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982). James Smith, What the Bible Teaches about the Promised Messiah (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993). These books can be ordered from: Purple Pomegranate Productions, Jews for Jesus, 80 Page St., San Francisco, CA 94102-5914. (415) 864-3900.

