

Bedrock of Christianity

Introduction

- Suppose that a Catholic, a Protestant, a Jew, and an agnostic—all honest historians cognizant of 1st-century religious movement—were locked up in the bowels of the Harvard Divinity School library . . .
- This sounds like the beginning of a joke, but is actually a thought experiment from New Testament scholars John Meier.
- The goal of this book is even bolder. Imagine all scholars from relevant fields locked up until they form a consensus of the facts concerning Jesus and early Christianity. Where would they agree?

Bedrock Sources

- Paul's letter are considered early and trustworthy sources.
- Seven are undisputed: Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon.
- *Mere Christianity* C.S. Lewis sought to lay out the doctrines that are agreed upon by all branches of Christendom: Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant.
- He called them "plain Christianity that no Christian disagrees with."

Bedrock Sources

- Paul and Peter met for 15 days (Galatians 1:18) within a few years after the crucifixion of Jesus.
- Paul says he went there to "obtain information from Peter."
- Paul makes it clear that he is telling the truth: "Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying" (Galatians 1:20).
- This is one likely place where Paul received the creedal tradition he then cites in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7.

History and Time Travel

- Studying history is like time travel.
- In Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure, they use a phone booth to travel back in time to kidnap Socrates, Genghis Khan, Joan of Arc, Abraham Lincoln, Sigmund Freud, and Billy the Kid.



Historians Wish List

- Four distinct items that constitute a historian's wish list:
 - Early dating: sources close to the person or event
 - Eyewitnesses: multiple people who saw and/or recorded the event
 - Corroboration: sources that corroborate without collusion
 - <u>Unbiased</u>: sources that are not biased toward their subject matter

Bedrock Eyewitnesses: Paul

- Paul trained under Rabbi Gamaliel, one of the most famous rabbis of his day (Acts 22:3). He came from the nation of Israel, tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee, and a persecutor of the church (Philippians 3:4-6).
- All of that changed with he saw Jesus (1 Corinthians 9:1) who appeared to him after appearing to others (1 Corinthians 15:8). This took place within 2-3 years after the death of Jesus (Galatians 1-2).
- After his conversion, he spend time in prayer and contemplation and likely spent time in Arabia (Galatians 1:17) as well as Damascus and Tarsus.

Bedrock Source - 1 Corinthians 15

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

Bedrock Source - 1 Corinthians 15

- The first few verses of this chapter contain a creedal tradition of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.
- Paul says he received this early tradition (probably two decades earlier).
- Compare that to the historian's wish list (early sources, eyewitnesses).
- For example, the first historian to mention Gautama Buddha wrote more than 200 years after his death. The first biography of Buddha occurs almost 500 years after his death.
- What about corroboration from other sources?

	1 Corinthians 15	Acts 10-13	Mark 15-16
Death	Christ died for our sins	They put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross	It was the third hour when the crucified Him
Burial	He was buried	Took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb	Joseph bought a linen cloth, laid him in a tomb
Resurrection	He was raised on the third day	God raised Him up on the third day	He is risen; He is not here
Appearances	He appeared to Cephas, the 12, James, more than 500	He appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee	The Lord is risen and has appeared to Simon

Crucifixion

- We now have physical evidence of death by crucifixion.
- Yehohanan was crucified by the Romans, and we have his ankle bone with a nail still in his bone in the Jerusalem Museum.
- Crucifixion is where we get the word "excruciating" because of the horrible way a person would die on the cross.



Isaiah 53:5-6

But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Earliest Claims

- "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all" (2 Corinthians 5:14).
- "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" (Galatians 3:13).
- "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Earliest Recorded Sayings of Jesus

- "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me'" (1 Corinthians 11:23-24).
- "In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:25-26).

Appearances

- The list in 1 Corinthians 15 documents an appearance to three individuals (Peter, James, Paul) and to three groups (the Twelve, more than 500, and all of the apostles).
- The glaring omission in this list is the women, specifically Mary Magdalene.
- That may have been because the testimony of women in the ancient world did not count for much, or it could be merely that this list was a very brief chronology of some of the appearances.
- These were not hallucinations.

Rise of the Nazarenes

- How can we account for the rise of the Nazarenes?
- It survived the crucifixion of Jesus. It survived numerous persecutions.
- It became the dominant religious faith not only in Rome, but in the East, and eventually in much of the ancient world.
- Rabbi Gamaliel: If this group "is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God" (Acts 5:38-39).

Influence

- We could survey all the art (Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, Rembrandt's *Prodigal Son*), literature (Dante's *Divine Comedy*, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*), philosophy (Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Francis Bacon, Blaise Pascal), music (Handel's *Messiah*, Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*) and even films (*The Lord of the Rings, The Chronicles of Narnia*) that were inspired by the resurrection of Jesus.
- We could survey all the testimonies of people who have committed their lives to Jesus Christ (freed from addictions, occult influence, depression).

Influence

"For if Jesus did not rise again, but remains dead, how did the Apostles perform miracles in His name? But you say they did not perform miracles. How then was our religion founded? . . . For this would be the greatest of miracles, that without any miracles, the whole world should have eagerly come to be taken in the nets of twelve poor and illiterate men."

St. John Chrysostom

