

THE STUDY OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS AND THE AGRAPHA AND NON-CANONICAL SOURCES

I. Why seek the historical Jesus?

- A. Truth is a public matter
- B. It guards against distortion
- C. It is congruent with Christian Theology
- D. It enriches our understanding and faith

N.T. Wright: "For me, studying Jesus in his historical context has been the most profoundly disturbing, enriching, and Christianizing activity of my life. As a historian, I meet a Jesus the church has unwittingly hushed up—a more believable Jesus, a Jesus who challenges me more deeply than any preacher, a Jesus who evokes my love and worship by what he is and does, not by the sentiment or hype that some preachers fall back on."¹

E. Objections & Responses

1. First Objection:

"It is hard to believe that God could have acted in Jesus to make salvation possible for the human race and at the same time believe that knowledge of the story is possible only for those who have the intelligence and leisure to fight their way through the thicket of historical Jesus research. Surely, if knowledge of Jesus is as vital as Christians believe it to be, God would have made it possible for ordinary people to gain this knowledge without learning Aramaic or receiving Ph.D.'s in historical critical biblical studies."²

2. Second Objection:

II. AGRAPHA—SAYINGS OF JESUS NOT IN THE GOSPELS

A. New Testament Agrapha

Acts 20:35	In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, " It is more blessed to give than to receive. "
1 Cor 7:10	To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband.
1 Cor 9:14	In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.
1 Cor 11:24-25	When he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, " This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. " In the same way also 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. "
Luke 6:5 (only)	The same day, seeing a certain man working on the Sabbath, he [Jesus] said to him, " Man, if

¹N.T. Wright, "The New Unimproved Jesus" *Christianity Today* Sept 13, 1995:26.

²C. Stephen Evans, "Can the New Jesus Save Us?" *Books & Culture* Nov/Dec 1995:7.

in Codex Bezae)	you indeed know what you are doing, happy are you; but if not, you are accursed and a transgressor of the law.”
John 7:53—8:11	The woman caught in adultery, Jesus said, “ Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? ” 8:11 She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “ Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again. ”

B. Other *Agrapha* that may be authentic

Clement of Alexandria, <i>Stromata</i> 1.24.158	Ask for the great things, and God will add to you what is small.
Origen, <i>On Prayer</i> 2	Ask for the greater things, and the small shall be added to you; ask for the heavenly things, and the earthly shall be added to you.
Origen, <i>Homilies on Jeremiah</i> 3.3; <i>Gospel of Thomas</i> 82	He who is near me is near the fire. He who is far from me is far from the kingdom.
Justin, <i>Dialogue with Trypho</i> 35.3	Many shall come in my name clothed on the outside with sheepskins, but inside they are ravenous wolves.
Justin, <i>Dialogue with Trypho</i> 35.3	There will be divisions and heresies.
2 Clement (95 A.D.)	If you are gathered together with me in my bosom and do not keep my commandments, I will cast you out and say to you, “Depart from me! I do not know where you are from, you workers of sin.”
Tertullian, <i>On Baptism</i> 20	No one can obtain the kingdoms [sic] of heaven who has not passed through temptation.
Eusebius of Caesarea, <i>Theophany</i> 4.12, citing the <i>Gospel According to the Hebrews</i>	I choose for myself the best; the best are those whom my Father in heaven gives me.
About 70 church fathers cite the saying, including Origen, <i>Com. John</i> 19.7.12; <i>Homilies</i> 2.51.1; 3:50.2; 18.20.4.	Be competent money-changers!

III. NON-CANONICAL SOURCES

A. Christian Sources

1. The Gospel of Thomas

2. Apocryphal Literature

E.g., The Infancy Story of Thomas

3. The Gospel of Peter

4. The Secret Gospel of Mark

The Secret Gospel of Mark

(2:23) And they came to Bethany. And there was a woman there, whose brother was dead. (24) And she came and fell down before Jesus and said to him: Son of David, (25) have mercy on me. But the disciples rebuked her. And in anger (26) Jesus went away with her into the garden where the tomb was; and (3:1) immediately a loud voice was heard from the tomb; and Jesus went forward and (2) rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb. And immediately he went to where (3) the young man was, stretched out his hand and raised him up, (4) grasping him by the hand. But the young man looked upon him and loved him, and (5) began to entreat him that he might remain with him. And when they had gone out (6) from the tomb, they went into the young man's house; for he was rich. And after (7) six days Jesus commissioned him; and in the evening the young man (8) came to him, clothed only in a linen cloth upon his naked body. And (9) he remained with him that night; for Jesus (10) was teaching him the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. And from there he went away (11) and returned to the other bank of the Jordan. ... (14) He came to Jericho. And there were (15) the sisters of the young man whom Jesus loved, and (16) his mother and Salome; and Jesus did not receive them.³

5. Egerton Gospel

B. Non-Christian Sources about Jesus

1. Josephus

a. Authentic

From Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* 20.200

He [Ananus, the high priest] assembled the Sanhedrin of the judges, and brought before it the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others [or, some of his companions]; and when he [Ananus] had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.⁴

b. Disputed

From Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.63-64

(63) Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works — a teacher of such men as received the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; (64) and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.⁵

³ "The Secret Gospel of Mark," in *New Testament Apocrypha. Vol. 1*. Wilhelm Schneemelcher and R. McL. Wilson, eds. (Revised Edition. Two Volumes. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1991) 108.

⁴ *The Works of Josephus. Complete and Unabridged. New Update Edition*. Trans. by William Whiston (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987) 538.

⁵ *The Works of Josephus. Complete and Unabridged. New Update Edition*. Trans. by William Whiston (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987) 480.

2. Babylonian Talmud

From the Babylonian Talmud (*b. Sanh* 43a)

On the Sabbath of the Passover festival Yeshu the Nazarene was hanged. For forty days before execution took place, a herald went forth and cried: "Here is Jesus the Nazarene, who is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favor, let him come forth and plead on his behalf." But since nothing was brought forth in his favor, he was hanged on the eve of the Passover ... Our rabbis taught: Yeshu had five disciples: Matthai, Nakai, Nezer, Buni and Toda.

3. Tacitus (ca. 55—120 A.D.)

From Tacitus' *Annals* 15.44.3

Christus, from whom the name [*Christiani*] had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and hateful from every part of the world find their center and become popular.

4. Suetonius (ca. 70—130 A.D.)

From Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars* (*Claudius* 25.4)

He [Emperor Claudius] drove from Rome the Jews who, stirred up by Chrestus, continually caused unrest.