

The Life & Teachings of Yeshua

*Learning about the real Jesus, his message, his culture
and the people he taught and loved.*

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The Misarranged Gospels

By Jim Myers

Comments, Points & Questions

- (1) By which name do you think he should be called?
- The first step of our journey to learn about the real Jesus, who lived in the first century in Galilee and Judah, is to discover that his name wasn't really "Jesus." Jesus is a name known to billions of people today, but no one living during his lifetime would have recognized it, not even his mother. It is the result of the work of translators of English versions of the New Testament who transliterated the Greek transcription of his Hebrew name, instead of returning to the original Hebrew language. His real name was "Yeshua." You would think that the first thing that every Christian would want to do is to start using his real name immediately.
- (2) Dr. Flusser's book is a must read and highly recommended by BHC! Go to the **Recommended Books** link at the BHC website.
- When we open the New Testament we find that the first four books are called "Gospels." The word "gospel" comes from a Greek word that literally mean "good message" or "good news." The four Gospels are the primary sources of information we have about the life of Yeshua. Dr. David Flusser (1917-2000) was one of the leading Jewish scholars in the world on Jesus and a professor of early Christianity and Second Temple Judaism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Below are comments from Dr. Flusser's book, The Sage from Galilee: Rediscovering Jesus' Genius. This is a book that BHC recommends highly. The underlines have been added to emphasize important points.
- The first three Gospels are primarily based upon common historical material, while the fourth Gospel, John, is correctly regarded as more concerned with presenting a theological perspective. The early Christian accounts about Jesus are not as untrustworthy as scholars today often think. The first three Gospels not only present a reasonably faithful picture of Jesus as a Jew of his own time, but they even consistently retain his way of speaking about the Savior in the third person. An impartial reading of the Synoptic Gospels results in a picture not so much of a redeemer of mankind, but of a Jewish miracle-worker and preacher. . . .
- (3) First three Gospels present a faithful picture of Jesus as a Jew of his own time.
- (4) Pictures Jesus not so much of a redeemer of mankind, but a Jewish miracle-worker and preacher.
- It is perhaps a stroke of luck, as far as our knowledge of Jesus is concerned, that the Synoptic Gospels were written fairly late – apparently around A.D. 70 – when the dynamic creativity within the Pauline congregations had diminished. For the most part, this later stratum of the synoptic tradition found its first expression in the redaction of the separate Evangelists and was styled in Greek. If we examine this material with an unprejudiced mind, we learn from its content and its manner of expression that it is concerned not with salvation statements, but with early Christian proverbs and sayings.
- (5) Contains early Christian proverbs and sayings.

(6) Earliest documents were composed by Jesus' disciples and the Jerusalem congregation in the Hebrew language. They were edited and translated into the Greek language. Those edited Greek copies were used as source materials by the authors of the Synoptic Gospels.

My research has led me to the conclusion that the Synoptic Gospels are based upon one or more non-extant early documents composed by Jesus' disciples and the early church in Jerusalem. These texts were originally written in Hebrew. Subsequently they were translated into Greek and passed through various stages of redaction. It is the Greek translation of these early Hebrew sources that were employed by the authors of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Thus, when studied in light of their Jewish background, the Synoptic Gospels do preserve a picture of Jesus that is more reliable than is generally acknowledged.

The order in which the books of the Bible are arranged play an important role in the way that readers understand them. Since the first book found in almost every Bible is Genesis, readers seem to mistakenly assume that all of the books in their Bible are arranged in chronological order. As far as the New Testament is concerned, if the books were arranged in chronological order, all of Paul's books would be first and the Gospels would be close to the end.

For many years BHC has held the position that the chronological order of the Synoptic Gospels is Mark, Luke and then Matthew. But after reviewing Dr. Flusser's position and testing it, we have now revised our position to align with his. We have no problem changing a long held position when we discover new facts. Below is a quote from his previously quoted book.

A critical reevaluation of the literary evidence thus indicates that Luke wrote before Mark. Mark then reworked the Luke's material and unfavorably influenced Matthew who followed Mark's version closely. It is important to add that Matthew, when independent of Mark, frequently preserves the earlier sources of the life of Jesus that lie behind Luke's Gospel. Hence, Luke and Matthew together provide the most authentic portrayal of Jesus' life and teachings.

(7) This guideline marks a major shift in BHC's position on this subject. We change our position when new facts are discovered.

Bible Study Guideline:

- (1) Luke wrote first.
- (2) Mark reworked Luke's material and unfavorably influenced Matthew.
- (3) Matthew followed Mark's version closely.
- (4) Accounts found in Matthew that are not found in Mark, frequently preserve the earlier sources of the life of Jesus that lie behind Luke's Gospel.

This guideline will be of tremendous help when trying to rediscover the earliest accounts of the life and teachings of Yeshua. As time passed, newly developed theological considerations influenced the way that the Gospels were copied and recopied. Below is an interesting study that begins with Luke 4:22 –

(8) I am sure you are aware of the potential theological issues of stating that Joseph is the father of Yeshua.

And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, "Is this not Joseph's son?"

You probably understand the theological issues that would arise in modern Christianity if Yeshua had an earthly father named "Joseph." Following the above

guideline, let's now move on to Mark's reworking of Luke's materials. This is found in Mark 6:3 –

(9) Mark doesn't mention Joseph, but introduces the idea that Yeshua was a carpenter.

“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?” And they took offense at Him.

Notice that nothing is said about anyone named Joseph or a father of Yeshua. Yeshua is now identified as “a carpenter.” Finally, let's see what the last Synoptic Gospel says in Matthew 13:55 –

(10) Matthew reworks Mark and doesn't mention Joseph by name, states that he is a carpenter.

“Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?”

The word “carpenter” only appears twice in the entire New Testament and you have read both verses. Luke told readers nothing about the occupations of either Joseph or Jesus. Mark reworks Luke's account and removes the reference to Joseph as the father of Jesus and adds that Yeshua was a carpenter. Finally, Matthew reworks Mark and removes Mark's reference to Yeshua as a carpenter and makes his unnamed father the carpenter. Based on our analysis of Matthew, our conclusion is that he probably dropped the reference to Yeshua as a carpenter because it did not match his Messianic concepts.

(11) Our goal is to view the ancient authors' words through their eyes and not filter them through our modern American eyes.

Bible Study Guideline: The more we learn about the culture of an author or the people involved in an event, the more accurately we will understand the message.

[A] BHC Study Guide.

Culture is the whole behavior and technology of any people that is passed on from generation to generation.[A] A culture is more than a set of rules to guide behavior; it is a comprehensive worldview and way of relating to one's fellow human beings. Like all complex cultures, Jewish culture does not spell everything out literally, but leaves much to inference. A culture's strength lies not only in what it says, but also in what it chooses not to say, and this too must be learned. [B]

[B] Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz

(12) In many cases, just translating the Greek will not produce an accurate translation. One must consider the Hebrew culture that is behind the Greek words.

As we conclude this article I would like to turn once again to comments made by Dr. Flusser (the underlining has been added to emphasize a point):

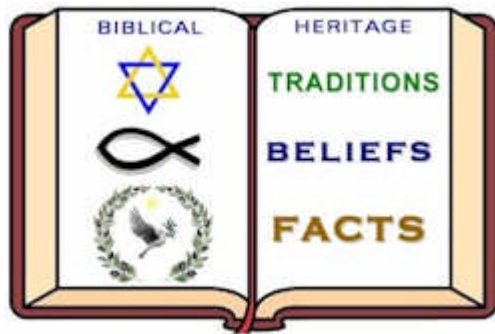
In order to understand the historical Jesus, it is not sufficient to follow the literary development of the Gospel material. We also need to possess intimate familiarity with Judaism in the time of Jesus. The Jewish material is important not just because it allows us to place Jesus in his own time, but because it also permits a correct interpretation of his original Hebrew sayings. Thus, whenever we can be sure that there is a Hebrew phrase behind the Greek text of the Gospels, we translate that, and not the literal Greek.

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Matters of faith are playing an increasingly greater role of importance in the political and social environments today. Our mission is to provide solid factual information about the book and the heritages from which those matters of faith originated. *Even though millions read their Bible regularly, many know nothing about its history or the heritages that shaped it and were shaped by it in return.*

For Christians the single most important historical figure is Yeshua, yet most of their beliefs are based on words attributed to Saul of Tarsus, a man who never met Yeshua during his life time; or on the thoughts of men who lived centuries later. The reason that BHC launched its new series *The Life & Teachings of Yeshua* is to help readers learn more about the one upon who the beliefs of over two billion people are based. Shouldn't modern Christianity reflect Yeshua's life and teachings?

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