

Who is the Real Originator of Christianity, Jesus or Paul?

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[Abstract] As we all know, Christianity is the largest religious movement the world has ever known. There are different views and debates about its originator. In the essay, the author reexamines the topic with the help of a detailed analysis of historical records.

[Key words] Christianity, originator, Jesus, Paul

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I About Jesus

Christianity is the largest religious movement the world has ever known, claiming at least 1.7 billion followers around the globe^{[1]49}. On every continent in hundreds of languages, believers proclaim their faith in the man known to history as Jesus of Nazareth and to the church as Jesus Christ.

1.1 Descriptions of the life story of Jesus in the New Testament

Before Jesus began his ministry, little is known of Jesus. He was from Nazareth of Galilee, although both Luke and Matthew place his birth in Bethlehem of Judea, the ancestral home of King David. Only the books of Luke and Matthew contain birth and infancy stories, and these differ in several details. Luke relates the stories in poem and song woven from Old Testament texts that highlight God's concern for the poor and despised. Matthew patterns his story on that of Moses in the Old Testament. Just as Moses spent his childhood among the rich and wise of Egypt, so was Jesus visited and honored by rich and wise magi. As Moses was hidden from a wicked king's laughing Jewish male children, so was Jesus saved from Herod's massacre. (Since Herod the Great died in 4BC, Jesus was probably born between 6 and 4BC.)^{[2]16}

The Gospel of Luke states that Jesus began his ministry in the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius, which would be AD 28-29. All four Gospels agree that Jesus was crucified when Pontius Pilate was governor (AD 26-36) of Judea. Jesus' ministry was conducted between 29 and 30, according to the view that he ministered one year, between 29 and 33, according to the theory that his work extended three to four years.^{[2]16} The Gospels present the ministry of Jesus as the presence of God in the world. His words revealed God and God's way for his people; his actions demonstrated the healing power of God bringing wholeness of body, mind, and spirit; his sufferings and death testified to God's relentless love; and his resurrection was God's sign of

approval of Jesus' life, death, and message. St. Paul and others developed views of Jesus' death as sacrifice and atonement for sin and of Jesus' resurrection as guarantee of the resurrection of his disciples. Documents written during persecution interpreted Jesus' suffering as the model for Christians in the hour of martyrdom.

The New Testament presents its understanding of Jesus in titles, descriptions of his person, and accounts of his word and work. Jesus was portrayed as a prophet like Moses, the Davidic king, the promised Messiah, the second Adam, a priest like Melchizedek, an apocalyptic figure like the Son of man, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, and the Son of God. The Hellenistic culture provided other images: a preexistent divine being who came to earth, accomplished his work, and returned to glory; the Lord above all Caesars, the eternal mediator of creation and redemption; the cosmic figure who gathers all creation to himself in one harmonious body.

1.2 Debate over the historical Jesus

Scholars and clergy have long debated over the historical Jesus. Although the Jesus Seminar and a segment of Christianity—fundamentalist and evangelical Protestant and traditionalist Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox believers have different opinions, they agree that Jesus lived in the 1st century BC in Palestine, that he was a Jew, and that he stirred a segment of the Roman-ruled Jewish society and was crucified—a mode of punishment reserved for common criminals in his time. Albert Schweitzer, a theologian of 20th century, believed that Jesus was an apocalyptic-minded 1st-century BC Jew who preached the imminent arrival of God's kingdom within a wholly Jewish context—that is, he was someone who believed fully in Jewish messianic prophecies and who did not intend to launch a new religion.^{[1]51} John Dominic Crossan, a former Roman Catholic priest and a professor of DePaul University in Chicago, drew the most irritating conclusion for traditionalists is that Jesus could not have physically risen from the dead because his body was likely thrown

to the dogs after being taken down from the cross.^{[1][5]} Retired religion professor Robert W. Funk sums up the conclusions of the Jesus Seminar. He writes that Jesus was probably born in Nazareth, not Bethlehem as the biblical tradition claims; that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist who was almost a historical figure; that Jesus had four brothers and may also have had sisters but no father named Joseph; that his public career as a preacher lasted from one to three years; and that he was crucified in Jerusalem.^{[1][5]} What broadly emerges from Funk's book and the writing of other Jesus Seminar participants is a Jesus who was an itinerant social critic and sage in the Jewish wisdom tradition that concerned itself with ethical and philosophical matters. He was a rebel who led an egalitarian revolution against a repressive established social order but harbored no divine pretensions. Similarly, the Dead Sea Scrolls, written between the end of the 3rd century BC and AD 70, first discovered in 1947 in a series of caves at Qumran, Jordan, refer to a leader known as the Teacher of Righteousness who singularly pointed out his status as the one member of the group through whom God spoke—setting a precedent for Jesus to regard himself in similar tones. For these critics, what is most important about Jesus is not the details of his life but the impact of that life. As Schweitzer said, historical biography is an imperfect art, subject to the availability of sources that are difficult to separate from human biases because of the passage of time. To engage in historical biography when the subject lived 2000 years ago in a premodern culture is far more difficult. Still, almost everything about Jesus is being disputed.

II. About Paul

Paul was regarded the most distinguished preacher, theologian and representative of epistles in early church. He was originally a pious adherent of Judaism and took an active part in the persecution of Christians, but after an unusual religious experience, he changed his belief and converted to Christianity. From then on, he devoted all his life to the career of disseminating Christianity. In 40–50, Paul launched three long journeys to Greco-Roman world and preached. During the period he wrote many epistles, in which the doctrines of Christianity in early church was systematically expounded. The epistle or letter in the Greco-Roman world was a fairly standardized literary form consisting of signature, address, greeting, eulogy or thanksgiving message, and farewell. St. Paul found this form congenial to his relation to the churches he had established in the Christian community and was used by other church leaders and writers. The epistles that they wrote, some of which appear in the New Testament, are really sermons, exhortations, or treatises thinly dis-

guised as epistles. In the epistles, Paul put forward a series of theologies. He argued that whether a human person can be saved and keep proper relation with God, not depending on his observance of the Pentateuch, but depending on a real proclamation to God or Jesus Christ.

According to the records of the Acts of the Apostles, Paul was a Jew from Tarsus, who became a convert to Christianity near Damascus about 33–35.^{[2][17]} After 14 silent years, Paul began to write his Epistles, making an missionary career that took him through Syria, Galatia, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece, and Rome. Apparently his life ended in Rome in the early 60s.^{[2][17]} Paul's Epistles and the Acts offer the reader some understanding of the life of these early Christian communities and their relationship to the larger cultures. His prominent contributions and efforts to the development of Christianity made Christianity spread widely in the Greco-Roman world.

III. Conclusion

From the above descriptions, we can see that there are intense debates and different opinions about Jesus, but it is possible to infer that there was a Jesus in history. Although the records are not complete and weren't written critically according to the history, the fragments gave us some information about Jesus. It is reasonable to believe that Jesus launched Christianity. The birth of Jesus was a myth. A human person will not be born like that. But in China, it is said that Confucius was born owing to the pregnancy of his mother after a whirlwind. In this way, a cloud of holy aura hang over Jesus to indicate that Jesus or Confucius was different from others at birth. In the New Testament, Jesus was portrayed as having died on the cross to redeem human sin, would rise from the grave and reappear to his disciples, which is only a happy wish for Christians.

Jesus is the real originator of Christianity, though his ministry was short and maybe he didn't realize that a new religion had been launched under his leadership, which has had a great impact on the world. As for Paul, he made much more contributions to the development of Christianity than Jesus, which shouldn't be neglected.

【References】

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谁是基督教真正的创始人, 耶稣还是保罗?

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【摘要】 众所周知, 基督教是世界上最大的宗教运动。关于基督教的创始人历来存在不同的观点, 争论很多。本文通过对历史记载的分析, 对这一问题进行了探讨。

【关键词】 基督教; 创使人; 耶稣; 保罗